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Civilization, Culture and the New Barbarians

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abstract: There has been a revival in western thought of romantic ideas of society and history that had, before the Second World War, been associated with conservative and right-wing political movements and ideologies. The emphasis on an unreflected notion of 'culture', postmodernist relativism, scenarios of the wars of civilizations, fundamentalist reclamations of authenticity and multiculturalist celebrations of difference constitute a revival of irrationalist social theories, where culture replaces race as the organizing principle of a theory of predispositions inherent in ethnic, religious and national groups. This repetition of late 19th-century polemics against degeneration and against the Enlightenment gathered force in a context marked by the fall of the socialist bloc, deregulation, structural marginality and the waning of humanism in favour of an anthropological pessimism emphasizing singularity.

keywords: barbarism ✦ culture ✦ Enlightenment ✦ Islam ✦ neo-liberalism ✦ Romanticism

The vast mood of disenchantment with civilization[1] is not merely one that seems to be activated at the end of millennia, even of centuries, with echoes of chiliasm even to the minds of those of us who are most resolutely convinced that the world might be disenchanted, that signs might be deciphered, that numbers could be made to stand before us demystified. I assert that the burden of the present moment consists in a state of liminality, not because of some reference to number mysticism at the beginning of a millennium and the end of another, but because, at a time when phantasmagoric scenarios like the end of history and the wars of civilizations are announced, deregulated Europe and the USA seem to be

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reverting to the mental world that predominated before the Second World War, and which, among other factors, precipitated that war. The postwar humanism that was made imperative by the evident calamities of war is everywhere on the wane. Some recent developments in empirical US social science research connect with much older lineages in studying educational underachievement, poverty and sexual preference, among other things, in terms of biological predisposition.

My subject concerns the primacy of reactionary rather than of liberal ideas in modern European history, and postmodernism which, for all its declared anti-foundationalism, is fundamentally a grand narrative of the irrational; I assert that the discourses on the barbarian within and the barbarian without are isomorphous, because both share a pessimistic anthropology beyond history, an anthropology which views human collectivities as governed by a natural history rather than one seriously involving human agency, by fatalism rather than historicity. I propose to bring to bear upon civilization and barbarity the ineradicable insistence of the present moment, and begin with the current mood of disenchantment with civilization.

Despairing of civilization, hankering after times past or utopias present among simpler peoples, the cult of nature, of the primitive and of the precolonial idyll, are not of course the preserve of western cultural studies academics or non-governmental organizations today. Nor is this primitivism of the civilized too often associated with reformist projects, which take the primitive as their model: this is so not only for the impossibility of repetition, but also because primitivism and the fascination with noble savages are more often the object of an air of ironic or melancholic despair of the present. Unlike the phantasy of Adamic and prophetic moments of foundation in monotheistic eschatologies and the fundamentalist transformation of these foundational moments into utopias and programmes for social, moral and political reform or revolution, some happy primitives are hardly examples to be emulated, fortunate in their primitive condition and with every right to remain in it as they may be judged to be. This discourse on the primitive is ubiquitous and quite timeless in its topoi. One might cite here the Scythians in the eyes of some Greeks, the Germans to all Romans, or indeed certain fundamentalist movements to the US State Department, as with the so-called Afghan 'resistance' before it spurned its original sponsors. Tacitus, for instance, a man not given to nostalgia or sentimentalism, thought the Germans loved indolence and hated peace, that they were not easily prevailed upon to plough yet were impatient for the harvest (Tacitus, 1999). In the Arab Middle Ages, Ibn Khaldûn, among many others but most famously, admired with melancholy resignation the unflinching virility and purity of heart of the very Bedouin who lays civilized cities to waste and terminates their hubristic effeminacy (Ibn Khaldûn, 1969). One and a half millennia after Tacitus, at

a time when Celts in Britain were generally held to be barbarians and antitheses of what constituted civilized Britishness, Coleridge (1969) eulogized the primal innocence of Scotland's highlanders, the 'Kilda's race', from a melancholy yet regretful distance:

> On whose bleak rocks, which brave the wasting tides,
> Fair nature's daughter, virtue, yet abides;
> . . .
> Suffic'd and happy with that frugal fare
> Which tasteful toil and hourly danger give.

I have often heard members of the Berlin intelligentsia speak, in not dissimilar terms albeit far more prosaically and jokingly, of the '*echte Berliner*', with the sort of admiration that confirms aloof distinctiveness, just as Cockney speakers in the East End of London have often been regarded by less anonymous English as exotic, as civilization's Other. I have also often come across distantiating admiration of this sort for all manner of bizarre or dangerous political phenomena, such as political Islamism or Hinduism, deemed fitting and appropriate – indeed, natural, fated – for some other, more colourful, less civilized peoples.

The 19th and 20th centuries have seen a firmer organization of discourses on the primitive, happy but more generally unhappy, praiseworthy but more often lamentable. That period also saw a consolidated and self-consistent anti-modernism, predominantly in a spirit of the Enlightenment and not often of the primitivist variety, although this varied regionally, with the German intelligentsia being more prone to historical nostalgia than others. The two centuries past constitute an epoch indelibly marked by scientism and its consequences, and the malaise of civilization as conceived in our epoch is hardly conceivable without reference to scientific attainment, as action upon or against nature as much as an aesthetic marker of social distinction. Scientism of course ought not to be altogether caricatured, despite its own efforts in this regard, perhaps most zealously and piously among now forgotten 19th-century German positivists like Maleschott and Büchner, in an attitude elsewhere delightfully captured in the character of Bazarov in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, who regarded the dissection of frogs to be far more important than poetry, because it led to the truth.

Some form of scientism is without doubt a major premise of modernity. This applies as much to conceptions of nature as to bureaucratic and social-engineering notions of civility and social control. Anti-modernist trends have therefore often but not necessarily involved forms of anti-scientist scepticism; they took as the polemical model against which they measured the actuality and the relative uncertainty of scientific knowledge the very paradigm of extremist scientism; this paradigm regards

science as a finalist and infallible form of magic. What I have just said applies just as much to the standard philosophical scepticism deployed by conservative Catholics and other anti-positivists in the 19th century such as Lamennais and Ravaisson (Spencer, 1954; Popkin, 1979; Malone, 1967; Foucher, 1955); it applies equally to philosophically trivializing Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty and its consequences in the course of this century, as much as to impressionistic invocations of chaos theory today – impressionistic and ignorant, as the highly deterministic chaos theory is read emblematically as a refutation of scientific determinism.

There is of course another cardinal principle for the mental culture of modernity, namely, historicism. This implied the valorization of history by associating substantive notions of progressive and elevating change to the passage of time. Historicism, calling up names like Hegel and Marx – as distinct from the historist doctrine, which was also perfected in Germany – is a notion of history and society as provinces of consequential change, not of substantive abidance or of naturalistic fatalism within the boundaries of self-subsistent and self-consistent cultures, or culture-nations, and historicism took on many forms, not least those of evolutionism, of progressivism, with or without teleological implication.[2]

Both cardinal principles of modernity, in tandem, had very strong, indeed and by way of antithetical inversion, constitutive implications for notions of the state of nature, the primitive and the barbarian. For these antitheses of civilization had, with modernity, come largely to be conceived as its antecedents, and were now regarded against a measure whose criterion is the accomplished work of time, a cumulative work which is in principle of benefit to all of humanity. Humanity was of course not an altogether new concept, and Dante, in *De Monarchia* (1998), had already spoken of *humana civilitas*, in a sense which remarkably anticipates modern usage. But the novelty resides in giving humanity a temporal dimension along a ladder which constitutes the civilizing process, a ladder which replaced the static hierarchies of medieval conceptions of Latin and Arabic, and which transformed the notion of civility and its various linguistic forms from the older, restrictive sense of defining a superior sociality and courtesy which predominated until well into the 18th century. Yet this notion of civility remained with a decisive presence, and constituted discourses on others insofar as these were discourses of social superiority in which breeding was combined with science and reason.[3]

There were under the regime of modernity, *grosso modo*, two distinctive tempers that have dwelt upon the misfortunes of civilization in general. One was rationalist, despairing of the historical possibility of rationality and its generalization within society and among societies. The other was historist, anti-rationalist, indeed irrationalist, decrying reason

and progress because they damaged the natural constitution of society, and generally associated with conservatism. This second temper[4] has often been – and is still – associated with some form of anti-industrialism or romantic and pietistic anti-capitalism, and sometimes celebrates a prelapsarian past – of national vigour and simplicity, of order and hierarchy, of pure and primal religious life, or simply of the happy vegan life according to nature – as a time of plenitude and harmony. We can characterize the former as rationalist, the latter as romantic, the one associated with Jacobinism, the other with nationalism and *Sturm und Drang*: whereas this last can be very attractive in the arts and letters, it is manifestly dangerous and retrogressive in politics.

Now I do not wish to dwell long on these well-known matters, and I simply remind you of some features of particular salience to my description of the *fin-de-siècle* malaise with which we live today. Against the Enlightenment, accelerated by the French Revolution and by the internationalization of the republicanist model of social and political organization through Napoleonic action and example in Europe, Ottoman lands and Latin America, a profound seam of anti-Enlightenment speculation and action was in place. In Europe, most particularly in Germany and England, with Burke, Coleridge, Hamann and Herder among countless lesser others, it took the form of a diffuse but often virulent anti-Gallicism; in France itself the Enlightenment was vigorously combated after the Revolution by Royalists and Catholics like de Maistre and Bonald in terms which became standard statements of hierarchical organism, and this was of course countered by very strong positivist and evolutionist tendencies.

Despite these tensions and antagonisms, the boundaries were not always fast and firm, and German organismic and vitalist theories of nations and cultures were nevertheless resonant and deeply influential. This is not least because historism, by substituting a particularistic anthropology of the *Volksgeist* for history, posits a natural history of society to which time is somehow incidental and insubstantive, a natural history which, in certain inflections, might also be regarded in the spirit of certain Enlightenment notions of deterministic naturalism: these were manifestly important to Gobineau and to all subsequent racialist theories. The consequence of this is of course a thesis which goes very much in the opposite sense to Popper's famous but ignorant critique of historicism, for it is historicism which makes it possible to think of human liberty concretely, not some ahistorical liberalism or English pragmatic beliefs in the crooked timber of humanity.[5] Another index of the complexity of this process is Michelet's (1971) appreciation of German thought, and his belief that he might interpret Germany's dangerously obscure and pantheistic wisdom to a rationalist civilization, taking Germany to be the India of the West,

and believing himself to be a particularly apt interpreter of all that was good in German irrationalism on account of his being a Frenchman: France pronounced, according to him, the logos of Europe, just as Greece had previously articulated the logos of Asia to human posterity. Let me note parenthetically that Romanticism was not always vitalist, revivalist or socially conservative: witness for instance the celebration of artifice by Huysmans and later quite differently by Proust, or of libertinism or the cult of decadence and decay, of the reveries of opium-eaters, or indeed a combination of many of these elements in modernist poetry, in Dadaism and in surrealism – all studied with remarkable prescience by Mario Praz (1933).

Having indicated certain elements pertaining to predominantly anti-Jacobin political Romanticism, let me turn to the theme of barbarism and of the precariousness of civilization, and work through it until properly woven together, in the manner of the present moment, with the disenchantment and re-enchantments of the Romantic. The salience of 19th-century anthropology and philology for the discovery of the unromantic and disagreeable primitive within and without, in a stratigraphic relation to civilization, cannot be overemphasized. The combination of an acute sense of social distinction, and a strongly scientistic outlook towards civilized accomplishment which made of reason an aesthetic marker of elevation, led people like Ernest Renan to speak of human advancement in terms of *échelons*, of layers in uneven social, historical and geographical distribution, according to criteria of race and national breeding. Jacob Burckhardt (1921) similarly spoke of reason in matters of religion for the few, but for the many allocated only magic.[6]

For his part, Sir James Frazer picked up on these fairly common ideas, and told a Glasgow audience that a nation was in reality two nations, with a small minority far ahead of the rest. The reason for this was that members of this minority have

> . . . thrown off the load of superstition which still burdens the backs and clogs the footsteps of the laggards. To drop metaphor, superstitions survive because, while they shock the views of enlightened members of the community, they are still in harmony with the thoughts and feelings of others who, though they are drilled by their betters into an appearance of civilization, remain barbarians or savages at heart.

All this had been confirmed to Frazer's mind as to the minds of others by the Romantic quest for knowledge: the folk-tales collected by the Grimm Brothers, for instance, indicated the

> . . . astonishing, nay, alarming truth that a mass, if not the majority of people in every civilized country is still living in a state of intellectual savagery, that, in fact, the smooth surface of cultured society is sapped by superstition.[7]

Note that Frazer like many others did not flinch from calling a society 'civilized' when its vast majority was savage and barbarian, and that his yardstick was purely cognitive and exclusivist, disavowing any notions of human improvement or of the generalization of civility. This cognitive criterion was superimposed upon that other but correlative and indeed defining figure of 19th-century barbarity, namely, poverty, whose existence like that of cultural disadvantage owes not a little to the kindness of the civilized minority. I will come back to this later with reference to today. With the exception of intellectual trends influenced by Marxism and positivism, cultural pessimism was all the rage at the *fin-de-siècle* that preceded ours: among very many others we could choose almost at random Frazer, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, the one an anthropologist, the second a moralist and aesthetician, the last a Karamazovian narrator of the radical imperfection of humankind and of its entomological affinities. All three felt civilization to be something very precarious, resting uncertainly and improbably on a seething magma of barbarity, of primal humanity that, by virtue of the nature to which it is fated, eluded the Weberian dream of rational organization, or its amplification in Norbert Elias's civilizing process: it eluded the generalization of civility, the acquisition of a distinctive sense of time and temporality, the internalization of external coercion, as indeed involved the drawing up in the 19th century of rules for the regulation of hazardous, bloody games like football, and their transformation into sport. All of this, of course, falls within the terms of Weber's contention in *Politik als Beruf* (Weber, 1926) – a celebrated but overrated text – concerning the monopolization by the modern state of the use of violence. None of these was a process generalized, as witnessed external observers as well, and I should like to refer here specifically to the savage satire of Shidyâq, a towering and wonderful Rabelaisian figure of Arabic letters in the 19th century, of the manners and customs of Parisians and Londoners, and his disquisitions on their common folk.[8]

Yet this restless human magma did not consist only of uncouth rustics, drunken tradespeople and domestic servants, but crucially constituted crowds, imposed universal suffrage upon reluctant authorities, participated in revolutions, manned barricades, set up communes, executed priests, fulfilled the spectral promises made in the opening passage of *The Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It made a spectacle of historical change, and this was regarded by their betters as evidence of irrationality unrelated to social conditions of eruption. And it was indeed by means of irrationalist suggestions that this genie on the streets was wrapped up and domesticated, by means of jingoism, imperialism and war – the genie without, the colonial or the primitive, had not yet arrived as an active agency. But barbarians both inside and outside were alike, for Frazer as for many others: Adolphe Blanqui was only one of very

many 19th-century Frenchmen to compare Algeria and other colonies with various parts of metropolitan France as yet uncivilized.[9]

Over and above the fatalistic anthropology of Enlightenment's despair, of a Frazer for instance, were other, more finely targeted doctrines of pessimism, most systematically the social psychology of crowds sketched by Gustave Le Bon (1960), later taken up with different variations by various others, synthesized by Sigmund Freud (1959), and continued by Elias Canetti only 40 years ago (1962). The crowd became a metaphor for the exotic and barbarian commoner.

The first Freudian synthesis assimilated crowds to children, dreams, neurotics and primitives, in their propensity to accept suggestion, to sympathetic response and to the identification of the ego with the collectivity, all of which also calls to mind the contemporary theses of Levy-Bruhl concerning primitive mentalities, their dependence on suggestion, their mytho-poetic turn (Levy-Bruhl, 1966). Freud later produced two grander syntheses (Freud, 1961a, 1961b). Here, in a manner even less historical than hitherto, the task of civilization was construed not only against history but against nature herself. Civilization was defined ultimately as a defence against natural human proclivities to incest, cannibalism, lust and murder, very much in the manner of the pessimistic anthropology on which rested the deduction of the necessity of the state by medieval Arabic authors, and some centuries later by Thomas Hobbes. But Freud, unlike Weber, was not particularly interested in the state, and, not unlike theorists of ideology from Marx to Mannheim or indeed Foucault two generations later, was in parallel concerned with the internalization of repression and its acceptance as natural. For this task, the delusionary character of religion comes to the aid of civilized order, fixing the mass of the people in a state of mental and emotional infantilism. Altogether, civilization, whose yardstick for Freud was a very conventional enumeration of mental and aesthetic indices of social distinctiveness, was only possible because of sublimation. He held in contempt the notion of distinction between culture and civilization.

Of course, this disquisition on the imperatives of instinctual repression, the internalization of inhibition and the development of the superego as prerequisite to order, is standard in modern western thought. It corresponds to the classical formulation by Kant, very much in the spirit of pietism, of the distinction between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*, the latter arising from the hoped-for successful internalization of Elias's civilizing process. Hegel's formulation is of course equally classic, inspired by Enlightenment theories of despotism, particularly of oriental despotism, in which the despotic laws of orientals, most particularly of the Chinese and of Muslims, were enforced externally, materially, unspiritually, unlike those of the modern Prussian state.

It is interesting to note, parenthetically, that it is in these very terms of internalization that the religious legitimation of polity by refractory bedouins was conceived by Ibn Khaldûn in the 14th century (Al-Azmeh, 1982; Labica, 1968), and that, at the end of the 19th century, the great Muslim reformer Muhammad Abduh restated the traditional Muslim thesis that Islam absorbed and transcended the two monotheisms prior to it, by setting them in an evolutionist and dialectical sequence, in which Judaism rested on external, Levitical, coercion, Christianity was based in an enthusiastic sentimentalism, while Islam combined and transcended the two in the spirit of reason (Al-Azmeh, 1996: 102ff.).

Let us go back to the core line of the topic under discussion: the radical imperfection of culture, its precariousness and fragility in the face of a prior nature that is ever menacing, its need for constant maintenance in the face of the seething mass of barbarism just below the surface, and its inability, in Freud's view, to lead to happiness, not even through the security of religion. There is a certain amount of recent anthropological theorizing on similar topical material, some of which can be taken seriously. The anthropological work of Pierre Clastres (1977) on the origin of the state, for instance, or more elaborately the theses, somewhat Freudian and Frazerian at once, of René Girard (1986): that religions, as quintessential guarantors of order, are based upon the performance of a primal sacrifice including ritual cannibalism, that the passage from non-humanity to humanity took and constantly takes the form of violent unanimity towards a surrogate victim, that modernity provides forms for the maintenance of this reality, including nationalism with its concept of hereditary enemies; and, finally, that Frazer's rationalism itself was a ritualistic expulsion and consummation of religion, his dismissal of religion as intellectual malfunction itself being fanatical and superstitious, and of a decidedly sacrificial character.

Of course, those who despaired of civilization, most particularly conservatives, took the short step from indicating the parlous fragility of civilized order to affirming inevitable, cyclical or linear decline, degeneration and atrophy. There was a large body of writing on degeneration in the early part of the last century, a fevered time by all accounts, most particularly after the First World War and the revolutionary waves that followed it. For his part, the prominent Zionist Max Nordau (1895), like many others, spoke at length in the 1880s and thereafter of decadence, of decadent art and poetry in a manner curiously anticipating the equally romantic Goebbels; he spoke even of biological degeneration. Degeneration of the lower orders of society came metaphorically to stand for their uncertain subordination in an age of revolution. John Maynard Keynes himself thought the lower orders to be given to primitive and irrational proclivities (Keynes, 1971). Alexis Carrell, celebrated eugenist and winner

of the Nobel Prize for Medicine who, after a career in New York laboratories, became the cultural and scientific oracle of the Maréchal Pétain at Vichy, deplored the proletarian degeneration of the energetic and intelligent northern stocks, emasculated by massification, and incapable of improvement or elevation. Carrell's once famous book, *Man: The Unknown* (Carrell, 1991), was highly influential on some prominent radical Muslim fundamentalist thinkers of the 1950s and 1960s, who appreciated both his ramblings about degeneration, and his staunch belief in a small guiding minority.

This environment of *Kulturkritik* in its various national and other forms, some of them melancholic, had as a counterpoint moods of affirmation: the affirmation of subliminal life in *Lebensphilosophie*, with the accent on the immediate, the protoplasmic, the primal, the irrational, the national, the abiding, that which is untouched by the wiles of civilization; this affirmation, as project or as statement of loss, was the *deus ex machina* of European irrationalism in this and other periods. Note for what follows, that the romantic evaluation of instinct whose repression by civilization is a mark of degeneration, from Nietzsche through Klages, Ernst Jünger and other proto-fascist and fascist thinkers, not all of them German, was decisive for the postmodern critique of modernity inspired by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1972).

Thus for society or the nation as a physical organism – rather than as a mutable historical phenomenon involving human agency – could be substituted the organismic metaphor of Romantic historism, whose substratum is spirit rather than race. Among others, Spengler's (1928) morphology of the historical organism is conceived very much in line with a bacteriological notion of culture, which involves a deterministic natural history of the spirit, ending in what he called 'civilization', this being the atrophied, effete, degraded and degenerate form of a culture once great. The combination here of an icy deterministic Romanticism with a naturalistic irrationalism was particularly apt for the moment of its genesis. The Spenglerian heresy represented by Toynbee (1948) was vastly more learned and plausible, and perhaps less amenable to direct political use. The predominance of such ideas, no less than the spread of this *volkisch Kitsch* to the left by way of populism, was arrested by the Second World War, with the exception of the idyllic visions of some British historians.

Let us move more than half a century ahead, to the close of the millennium just past, to the present moment of deregulation and neo-globalization. The intervening period witnessed the rise of means other than authoritarianism and warmongering to deal with the barbaric magma below and to assimilate it. This was the Keynesian consensus that followed from the Second World War and from the vigour displayed by the

Soviet Union – the necessity of employment for all, the welfare state, the New Deal, later in the United States, Johnson's Great Society and the idea of positive discrimination. These developments entailed not only the socialization and elevation of the commoner, but also his de-barbarization. In the Third World – and I am here starting my change of key – this was the great era of the UNESCO, the UNDP, of national independence and non-alignment, of comprehensive development programmes, all of which led to the predominance of another discourse on outsiders, the de-barbarizing discourse of universal development, of takeoff, except among circles in Europe which were then thought to be hopelessly anachronistic. The barbarian outsider, the colonial, was becoming an ex-colonial, and was no longer generally inert or only furtively active in his or her unreason. The barbarian outsider was being assimilated in turn.

The great swell of change in the 1980s, in which the Keynesian basis of the postwar order was jettisoned, became possible, with indecent haste, once the alternative historical, Jacobin project available since the Bolshevik Revolution was no longer available – capitalism had in previous decades taken over socialist ideas just as 19th-century authoritarians like Gladstone and Bismarck took over ideas of universal suffrage. While Keynesian policies and ideas were triumphant, the more archaic fundamentalism of free market economics was confined to the margins: Friedrich von Hayek, most abidingly, no less than the younger Milton Friedman (1968) who spoke of a 'natural' rate of unemployment. Yet in the name of the market is being now reproduced just this turbulent magma, within Europe and without, constituting what Toynbee called a new proletariat, internal and external, which owes nothing to civilization: with remarkable prescience, Toynbee used the term 'the post-modern age' as early as 1953, to designate the decline in the modernist European middle classes of the 19th century from about 1875, and the rise of these excluded and confined proletariats (Toynbee, 1953). These were historical processes that precipitated the events of 1917–20, the rise of National Socialism and the Second World War. All of these events interrupted the post-1875 trend identified by the great British historian, and were compounded by the social prophylaxis of Keynesianism, leading to the century-long delay in the arrival of conditions of postmodernity as understood by Toynbee.

With the collapse of Communism – that ultimate form of irrationality during the Cold War, with its great fears and mass hysteria – and of the western Keynesianism correlative with it, came the almost total disappearance of the notion of economic and social development for countries of the South. This was replaced by notions of structural adjustment in the economy and an emphasis on romantically anti-state, and therefore anti-national locality in social development. All this was made in terms

and in the name of a market considered to be the natural as well as the desirable state of humankind, and justified with a tawdry theology of the market as might be composed in a bazaar in a downmarket suburb of Sodom. Equally of the order of nature in this perspective are various areas of deregulation, which have come to comprise state, culture and society in deliberate involution: all of these are of course matters familiar from the cant of what we may call culturalist conservationism on a world scale. In the same breath, structural marginality and the existence of large permanent rates of unemployment, the segmentation of the labour market, geographical and other forms of segregation, became facts of life, facts of nature. Toynbee's proletariat becomes a vast metaphor for sociocultural and consequently political marginality, both internal and external.

With this came the remarkable revival in the West of extremist nationalism, jingoism and militant racism, associated with a broad, effective, quite diffuse, revival *après la lettre*, as it were, of the classical repertoire of romantic, conservative, vitalist conceptions of society and of history. Notions of natural, almost biological boundaries of inter-group sympathy, of the impossibility of coexistence or integration, are all notions deriving from this repertoire, and are freely used by politicians in Europe as if they were matters of neutral self-evidence. What I am suggesting is that the present moment is marked by a culturalist turn, which totalizes the social inside, grounded in modes of thought about society and culture that describe themselves as postmodernist, and which sublimates the notion of race into the notion of culture and of specificity. Like the *Kulturkritik* I referred to and the *Lebensphilosophie* associated with it, this neo-Cartesianism of the irrational (Eco, 1987: 129) claims the recovery of things hidden by civilization, the abiding premodernity of others palatable to postmodernist taste, backwardness restituted from the snares of the Enlightenment and the modernities it spawned, a prior order of nature, a vital force, rising up as a mystery of infra-historical organisms that dwell beyond time. Once deregulated in this fashion, culture follows the market in its awakening, in its irredentism, in its voracity. I am not making a rhetorical point here: the privatization of culture entails its relegation, in practice and in principle, simultaneously to foreign, global actors (in the name of multiculturalism) and to private backward political forces internally, in the name of authenticity and locality.

I know that the vitalist, organismic, romantic genealogy of seemingly liberal postmodernism is not immediately recognizable, and this is unsurprising. Collective amnesia and the organized public manufacture of memory made generalizable by formidable means of communication, and the devalorization of lived historical memory in favour of the virtual, are essential to postmodernist mystification, and this is not lost on one of its prophets, Lyotard (1992) – although I must say that this connection with

romanticism and pragmatism is actually celebrated in postmodernist literary-critical histories of that particular calling. Standard textbooks of social or political theory give romanticism and vitalism decidedly minor positions in modern history, out of keeping with their historical weight.[10]

Western history in the last 200 years, political, social as well as intellectual, has only very partly been a history of liberalism and of reason; the terrible wars and atrocities of the 20th century, from the slaughter of two world wars, the war against Vietnam, on to ethnic cleansing and the murder of countless thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese by the Israeli Air Force, do not indicate an order of civilized sociality, no matter how many operas may be produced. Correlative with the social prophylaxis of Keynesianism, postwar democratic regimes successfully attempted to excise from public memory deliberate knowledge of ideological and conceptual tropes breathed by most Europeans for a century, and to displace an ample history and condense it into the shape of one particularly vicious monster, the Third Reich. This came to bear the entire burden of the banality of tribal evil; this and its consequences within West Germany would of course be greatly of interest in a Girardian perspective (Girard, 1986). The ideological and conceptual tropes with great affinity to the tribal idiom of demotic conversation, now renascent under a variety of liberal multiculturalist and other labels, are closely related to those that predominated until the Second World War. It is thus that the internal proletariat again becomes naturally fascist or at least unashamedly xenophobic, and the external reverts to natural barbarity; for the construal of the barbarian within and without in terms of naturalistic determinism – the magma underneath, the outsider – amounts to an absolution from responsibility, which comes easily with the denial of human agency in matters cultural and civilizational.

That the barbarian within and without is the result of a certain atrophy of Enlightenment ideals, an index of their lack of accomplishment and generalization, that the civilizing process has not been thorough, is not something that I dispute with postmodernists. What I do dispute is the deduction of failure or even non-existence from imperfection, unevenness and incompleteness, and questions of causality: I do not subscribe to the preposterous connection made between the Enlightenment and Auschwitz now much in vogue. That the Enlightenment in some of its currents was idealistic is indisputable; that it was also elitist, authoritarian, often highly pessimistic and far removed from notions of human perfectibility, indeed very complex and often ambivalent, Voltairian, if you will, is also true. Like all major or otherwise consequential currents in history, it is diverse and almost any generalization about it might become partly false as soon as it is formulated. Condorcet and de Sade are equally figures of the Enlightenment, and one should therefore not regard the Enlightenment

with the eyes of an antiquarian, but rather as a historical process which implicated institutions, states and entire cultural systems. Napoleon was perhaps its best representative: not only as a world-historical figure in the Hegelian sense, but as the first embodiment of the Enlightenment as a *longue durée* of international extent and depth, uneven in its articulations and undulations as this certainly was: paraphrasing Braudel somewhat, its history is the sum of all its possible histories.

Moments of Enlightenment might have sought the elevation of the common run of humanity, but it is also indisputable that the increasing rates of literacy in the 19th century were not merely acts of idealism of positivist programmes of social engineering, but at once more prosaically and profoundly, a mode of integrating Europeans into national states, of transforming Arabs and Turks into Ottoman citizens, of creating bureaucratic and other statist and cultural elites for the Napoleonic states I referred to through the educational system. But there is not much evidence that this process has had a necessarily civilizing effect, if measured against, for instance, actual mass reading tastes, or against the manifest recent atrophy of linguistic capacity which is manifest in Anglo-Saxon lands, but which is equally attested in Germany, France and elsewhere – with an apt hyperbole, H. M. Enzensberger (*Die Zeit*, 1985) spoke of High German gradually becoming a Germanic dialect poorly mastered as a foreign language in German schools and even in the universities.

Enzensberger, quite legitimately in principle, related this linguistic atrophy to the decreasing need for what I should like to call deliberative and discursive literacy, and, crucially in the light of what has been said, to the relative disengagement of culture from social legitimation and distinction, with the result that secondary illiterates can reach leading positions in society and polity – he cited as examples the then US president and the federal German chancellor. I might add more: the atrophy of deliberative writing and the erosion of paradox, ambiguity and irony in the linguistically prefabricated, highly invasive formulaic modes of journalism, in which the cliché takes the place of the concept, and the kitsch becomes the representative. This is of course reinforced by the paradigmatic role of televisual communication sacrificing linear sequentiality and cumulativeness to lateral association. There is also of course a degradation in public esteem for education, especially of higher education whose institutions are being run down by governments around the world.

The decline of the book, and the stylistic and other constraints on books increasingly in evidence, in addition to what I have just said, point very much in my view to a revival of orality, in evidence among other things in the increasing stress on the demotic in public life as in culture of the demotic. But of course this is no longer the naturally demotic, for the world has moved beyond this: Andy Warhol's cans of soup represent only

virtually demotic culture, becoming culture only when circulated and marketed as such, just as the recent Vespa scooter's 1950s retro-features (made in 1996) only become remembered by today's buyers when marketed as memory. This same could be said equally about the fevered imagining of authentic cultural selves by Serbian nationalists, assorted fundamentalists of various hues, from the Hindu through the Muslim on to the Zionist Ayatollahs in the Occupied Territories, and of course the cultural studies establishment in universities in the United States and elsewhere. One might also mention the extraordinary revival of the motifemic fairy tale in fantasy novels, comics and films, particularly in science fiction films replete with medieval and rustic stock images. This is indeed the world of the Grimm Brothers renascent, for literate adults no less than for children. Let me conclude this highly fragmentary catalogue by mentioning the atmosphere of infernal conspiracy pervading public life: phantasmagoric scenarios concerning the war of civilizations, the demonization with definite political purpose of, variously, the PLO until recent years, Saddam Hussein and of Muslims in general, as had been the case in the very proximate past, with the demonization of Communism, with prohibitionism and other public agendas in the political culture of the United States. These are all instances of mass-hysterical phenomena, like McCarthyism, various discourses on international conspiracies by Jesuits (in the eyes of the left in Catholic countries), of Freemasons (by Jesuits). Analogously prior to the greatest ever such phenomenon, the witch hunts in late medieval and early modern Europe, the continent was swept by vigorous campaigns to counter a conspiracy of lepers, assorted Saracens and Jews; it was thought, among other things, that the Saracens agreed to give Jerusalem to the Jews as a price for their participation in the undermining of order.[11]

From the barbarian within I come again to the barbarian without. We have seen that the primitive, the barbarian, the outsider, the laggard and a host of other antitheses or failures of civilization are bound together, as a generic group of cultural categories, with similar conditions of emergence in the civilized imaginary. In juxtaposition with a reconstitution, in conditions of acute post-Keynesian crisis, of the tribally conceived northern inside, riven with contradictions and indelibly marked by savagery as I have indicated, as happily postmodern, as being beyond modernity in the sole sense, as I see it, of being based on a modernity accomplished and renewed, whose normative, epistemological and aesthetic equipment is no longer necessary for the maintenance and management of the public order, normative functions having been reallocated to very thoroughgoing forms of the manipulation of consent – in conjunction with this is a culturalist construction of outsiders, as being themselves also in the mode of return to origins occluded. And just as notions of civic citizenship are

being questioned, most saliently in the United States, on grounds of communitarianism, so also are people of the South regarded from this perspective, and within the categories of North American multiculturalist practices; in this way, members of various western intelligentsias present themselves as midwives of the authenticity of others, construing what they term 'civil society' by dredging up pre-civil conceptions.

Altogether, this re-barbarization of the outsider takes the form of liberal sensibility.[12] In learned discourse it takes the form of appropriating the anti-orientalist theses of Edward Said: in this way orientals, especially those who describe themselves, quite implausibly, as postcolonial, in objective complicity with fundamentalist priests of authenticity, merge into the vicious cycle of this discourse of singularity; orientals are thus reorientalized in a traffic of mirror images between postmodernists and neo-orientalists speaking for difference, and native orientals ostentatiously displaying their badges of authenticity, in a play of exoticism from outside and self-parody from the inside. I have shown this in various writings to be a species of false memory, of invented memory marketed, like the retro features of the 1996 Vespa (Al-Azmeh, 1996). In this context, the discourse of culturalist specificity – instead of that of economic and social inequality and inequity – devolves to a post-1989 postulate concerning the congenital incapacity for modernity in a world of deregulation, hence for the inappropriateness of the economic, social and political treatment of economic, political and social problems arising from the recent forms of globalization and deregulation, and giving rise to the spectres of terrorism and immigration. The liberal-economic, free market proposals put forward as measures which will somehow, as if by the natural history of humanity so fated, cause this newer barbarism to disappear or at least render it invisible, seem in practice to be deepening the very socioeconomic conditions that give rise to it.

The re-barbarization of the southerner transforms him or her, beyond history and the international inequity of resources, into tribal warrior, refugee, asylum seeker or illegal immigrant. The southerner thus re-barbarized turns into a terrorist and fundamentalist. Inept and incapable of development, the southerner becomes the pathetic victim of famine and anarchy, to which he or she is culturally predisposed. Uncivilized and only superficially touched by modernity, he or she becomes again prone to tribalism and to wars of ethnicity and religion, all construed as the results of a natural history beyond human agency. Once again, we encounter the banality of irresponsibility, and we encounter a barbarian construed as eternal when this construal itself is based on a system of relations which is mystified in the name of nature. Yet the 'midwives' of barbarian authenticity do not speak with the voice of nature, for nature has no voice, but of naturalism and of a deterministic natural history of the cultures of

others; not of reality, but of virtual memory marketed. The aesthetic of exoticism and the distinctions based on wealth merge yet again.

I close by asserting that the conditions of the culturalist turn provide very hazardous conditions for the social sciences and humanities at the beginning of the millennium, twisting their gaze, providing ideological presumptions of inestimable force and consequence. Albert Einstein wrote to Sigmund Freud on 30 July 1932, in a sagely mode that I cannot begin to imitate, concerning war and mass suggestion, and we may take this in connection with crowds no less than in manufacturing postmodern communities of consent:

> Experience proves that it is rather the so-called 'Intelligentzia' that is most apt to yield to these disastrous collective suggestions, since the intellectual has no direct contact with life in the raw, but encounters it in its easiest synthetic form – upon the printed page.13

Notes

Different versions and portions of this talk were delivered at the State Library, Berlin (in association with the Einstein Forum), Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, the Brecht Forum, New York, and the Humanities Center at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. I am grateful to comments and questions from the audiences at all these venues.

1. There is a considerable literature on this notion, and I must rest content in referring the reader to Chaunu (1984). For broader perspectives, see Benveniste (1953), Febvre et al. (1930) and Kosellek (1980).
2. On this distinction, see, classically, Collingwood (1946).
3. The concepts 'civility' and 'civilization' are distinct notions. Refer to Al-Azmeh (in press).
4. On the conceptual constitution and ramifications of this, see Odouev (1980).
5. The reference is of course to I. Berlin's *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, but the expression itself comes from Kant.
6. Quite apart from the original texts, the reader may be especially referred to Olender (1992).
7. The citation is from Ackerman (1987).
8. A French translation of this author's work is *La Jambe sur la jambe*, translated by R. Khawwam (Shidyâq, 1990).
9. The citation is from Eugen Weber (1976).
10. This was not the case in writings emanating from the Soviet bloc, notably Lukács (1981).
11. The matter is wonderfully traced by Ginzburg (1990).
12. Among others, see Al-Azmeh (1996: Prologue and Ch. 1), Ahmad (1992: Chs 1 and 2), Callinicos (1989) and Taguieff (1987).
13. 'Ich denke dabei keineswegs nur an die Ungebildeten. Nach meinen Lebenserfahrungen ist es vielmehr gerade die sogenannte 'Intelligenz', welche den

verhängnisvollen Massensuggestionen am leichtesten unterliegt, weil sie nicht unmittelbar aus dem Erleben zu schöpfen pflegt, sondern auf dem Wege über das bedrückte Papier am bequemsten und vollständigsten zu erfassen ist.' The text is from a pamphlet containing correspondence between Freud and Einstein in the 1930s, *Warum Krieg?* (1996).

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