

The inside barbarism, a contemporary axiological mutation

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Abstract

Away from any appearances there is a series of subtleties. For culture and its conceptual ensemble, we have to distinguish what it opposes to it, and a majority would agree that it is about barbarism. Actually barbarism doesn't oppose to culture, but to its result, maybe the most refined one and the civilization. Culture and barbarism are like twins that have the same origin, they are complementary and they don't annihilate each other. One's eradication, for example the barbarism, would make an attempt to the culture. The organized form of culture, the civilization, bureaucratized, more and over disciplined, allows the barbarism to manifest in the culture through its breaches.

Considering the barbarism an inner phenomena of the human individuality, could permit the identification of these breaches of manifestation in the culture, and in this way we could conclude the civilization.

Keywords: *culture, civilization, the barbarism concept, inside and outside barbarism, axiological mutation.*

Two assertions guide me in understanding the inside barbarism like an axiological mutation. The first one: if we talk about an inside barbarism, this happens because of the existence of a cultural conflict with what we can call an outside barbarism; and the second one: if we consider this conflict of cultural origin as a result of a permanent fight between the terms of a relationship, that described the whole history of the civilization, in this case it is about us on one side and about others on the other side, and if we think about globalization, of its ancient form from history: the colonialism, and also about what we can call the principle of universality, then this conflict could only be the expression of an axiological mutation.

We deal with a series of concepts, that all together describe the way a mutation at an axiological level of the concept of barbarism took place, and to understand this situation we have to deal with two thesis, one of French origin and one of Italian inspiration, Jean-François Mattéi's in his book *The Inside Barbarism – Essay about the modern imund*, Michael Henry's, *The Barbarism* and Alessandro Baricco's, *The Barbarians- Essay about mutation*.

If Mattéi takes a step and recommends to his lectors the concept of inside barbarism, Henry looks into the method of introspection on our contemporaneous culture practiced by Mattéi, invoking the subjective feature of the human action, or distinguishing the tendency of retrenchment of the objective model of interpreting the barbarism. If Henry proposes three concepts that define the culture: religion, ethics and art, configuring a way of interpreting the culture, Baricco, when he talks about the mutation of barbarism, he distinguishes some situations that lead to religion, ethics and art, pointing out barbaric characters.

The inside barbarism does not actually suppose an outside barbarism. The first one is a conceptual construction used by Jean-François Mattéi, which states the fact that the origin of the barbarian behaviour and of the phenomena that entertains it, has its root in ourselves. To put it up in another way, these are intrinsic to us. The barbarian character of the human being is an a priori one, if we appeal to the anthropological and naturalistic theories, what's left of the animal origin is the human being, and if we look at it from a religious perspective, where the religious systems propose specific ways of interpreting the human origin and its rapport with the divinity on a different scale of creation, the barbarian character can be identified with the terms of negative origin between good and bad, or yin and yang etc.

The outside barbarism is a personal conception through which I did not want to find something that may oppose to the inside barbarism. Outside barbarism means the primary object for interpreting the concept of barbarism. This conception was made once with the first attempt of making a difference at the cultural level and it means the whole assembly the civilization was born in, as an alternative to what was visibly seen that was not respecting the norm, the laws, the costumes, the communions and the habits of a culture. If it does not oppose to the inside barbarism, it means that it is not part of it, but it derives from it. Barbarism has this adjective "outside" because it means a relationship between individuals: on one side the ones that in the sphere of what I have called previously, the own culture deposited and formed in time, which established in the collective memory of the society that posses it, and on the other side the ones that are outside of this

culture, from where it comes the division within the sphere of barbarism of the second society. However, this distinction does not oppose totally, because this way we would eliminate the possibility that the society that is called barbarian, not be like that, even if it is a distinct culture at a lower level. The opposition terms appear when between the two cultures interferes the level of civilization that is part of a great tradition of the technological progress and of the systems of communication of that society. Barbarism is outside only between the terms of a relationship, that generate conflict between “some” and “others”, the outside denoting the place where they are placed by the civilized barbarians.

“Some and others” become a dialect of the civilization and barbarism once we frequently use the ancient Greek culture, when the Greek civilization reaches the maximum height. E. R. Dodds in *The Greeks and the irrational* frequently uses the idiom: the Greeks and the others, making a difference between the achievements of the Greek culture and other cultures, without making of this difference a pattern that will show up the superiority of the Greek civilization instead of another one. The pattern subsequently generated “we and the others”, just to show up a “we”, that represents the superior society that acknowledges its level of civilization and an “others” that means the inferior society from a legal point of view of the civilization level, during the history it became one of the main scheme of construction of the differences. Just like any conflict starts because of some differences, we could say that along this distinction the history of the civilization was created. The great movements took place in the history because of a...

Here are some examples that could show the conflict between the terms of the relationship “we and others”¹. In The Ancient Greece, the barbarians were the ones that couldn’t speak Greek, they did not worship the Olympian gods and they did not had the Greek costumes or traditions, those that were on the outside of the Greek colonial empire, and later those that were on the outside of the Greek world, of the culture and of their civilization. During the Roman World, the barbarians, excepting the Greeks, that contributed a lot through their culture and civilization, to the Romans culture and civilization, they were the ones that were on the outside of The Roman Empire, they did not speak their language, did not have their religion or traditions, culture and civilization, and also their own organizing manner. In the history of the Christianity, paradoxically (the paradox comes from the word “we” that is used as belonging to the roman polytheistic civilization), the

¹ This relation reflects all the external history of the barbarism concept and all distinctive forms of *we* and *others* terms that the conflicts between them have generated barbarity.

barbarians were the followers of the new religion that began within the borders of the Roman Empire and that split like a hegemony till Rome, and then worldwide. Afterwards, the barbarians accepted the Christianity as the official religion of the Empire, after the crush of the roman Empire and during the entire Medieval Era, get the meaning of pagan (unbeliever), also given to the migratory nations, that became Christian along the time, Muslim nations, that were always in real danger at the borders of The Christian Europe, and later during colonialism, this meaning was given only to the new nations discovered in Asia, Africa and America. Recently, for the Occident, the name “barbarians”, was given in the context of the colonialism, to all the lethal enemies of the Old Europe, on one side, the ones that were opposing Europe’s expansion and force, because of the technical and cultural command (taking into account the Occidental Civilizations development), we’re talking here about the new nations that were discovered in the New World, in Africa and in the surroundings of Asia, and on the other side, the ones that were ignoring these aspects, the Muslim nations that were attacking Europe.

Therefore, outside barbarism does not come under a necessity of opposing something to the conceptual ensemble of inside barbarism, but to the necessity of explaining the origin of the civilization and of the conflict between civilizations. The outer side of the barbarism comes from the tendency of one that defines barbarism and through its culture perspectives and from its superior level of civilization, identifying itself with a “we” different from “ours”. This perspective of making the difference denotes the fact that “we” represents a society that first performs introspectively, analyzing itself, looking at itself, admiring itself and being proud of its culture. Having these analogy parameters, this society is reporting to the ones around it, classifying, cataloguing or naming them as different.

The direction towards interior is an action that does not operate with oppositions, but with distinctions, that allow us to say, through analogy, but not to moving away from what I have mentioned above, that between culture and barbarism we deal with a distinction, the opposition is only between barbarism and civilization, if we consider that it precedes praxeologically from what we call culture. To put it differently, civilization comes under the technological progress, of complex and understandable systems of communication, by a superior financial and social-economical development etc. and it is a permanent construct, that started because of the need of competition between societies, heavily trained in endless traces of overtaking and crossing out the adversary.

The concept of civilization is an artificial construct, specially created to

illustrate the necessary conflict between “us” and “others”, and to substitute the axiological character of the concept of culture. Civilization is a praxeologically ersatz that has the role of bonding material between culture and barbarism and between the deteriorated elements of culture, that could easily lead to some aspects of barbarism.

Jean-François Mattéi uses the inside barbarism not because it is a caprice or because it sounds good but because it shows the real character of the barbarism. It is inside because, as I have said before it is the summary of an introspection. Even though he did not mention on purpose in his essay “about the modern”² *imund*³, the inside barbarism is an axiological ensemble that illustrates the true source of the barbarism.

Many years before him (1977, Paris), Bernard-Henri Lévy, in *The Barbarism with Human Face* (*La barbarie à visage humain*) makes a reference about the same introspection, but in a more ironical way about the degrading contemporary society. The social, political and economical theme of his adventure novel (as it was dedicated by Bernard Henri-Lévy for Justin-Juliette at the beginning of the book) leads to the ways of barbarism as masks of civilization, represented by everything that progress means, and by all the ways of manifestation of the technical life and any kind of power. For Lévy, barbarism is the result of an introspection because “it exists from the beginning, the origin itself”, it means that, to be able to find out where violence, cruelty, volcanically nature and aggressive temper begins, we only need to find the origin, the first moment of creation, because “barbarism is the way the origin develops.”⁴

With such a precedent, Mattéi has to be remarked, especially because he makes an enormous step from the social, political and economical theme to the cultural one, that leads to the identification of some grave aspects of the everyday life. Critically, he has the courage to formulate some paradoxical idioms like: the barbarism of the culture, the barbarism of the education, the barbarism of the politics; adding the “barbarism” to culture and education makes it look like barbarism but it does not oppose to culture, they go hand in hand. Both barbarism and culture have the same origin and they are complementary through their way of manifestation. If barbarism overflows by energy and if it runs counter to the behaviours asked by the politics and education, two of the legislative systems of

² The book subtitle of Jean-François Mattéi, *Barbaria interioară*, trans. Valentina Bumbaș-Vorobiov, Paralela 45, Pitești, 2005.

³ Cf. DEX: very dirty, disgusting.

⁴ Bernard Henri-Lévy, *Barbaria cu chip uman* (The Barbarism with Human Face), trans. Irina Bădescu, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1992, p. 112.

the cultural phenomenon destined to temper it, the culture seems to be more comfortable and calm, making an appeal to the comfort of the laws, having a normative behaviour, excepting the genius manifestations. If barbarism was abolished forever, which is a Utopian desideratum, then neither culture nor civilization would not have any value. Moreover, the sluggish of the cultural actions, mixed by the legislation of the politic and hereditary overwhelmed by an educational system dependent by the humans' development in time, allow gaps through which barbarism could manifest.

Michael Henry identifies three kinds of gaps in the cultural assembly⁵. He proposed a quite delicate problem. First of all, he had to know what culture is, but he noticed that he could not make a definition out of such an immense domain, so he gave up on using definitions and he made his own system of defining through concepts. Concepts also needed to be explained, each of them with all their meanings and agreements so his steps were difficult to be made. Finally, Henry proposes three large concepts that include the other ones after the principle of the continuous generalization, so all of them should define a great part of the cultural domain. He decided that religion, ethics and art define the culture.

Henry uses for the three concepts the expression "cultural ways", through which culture manifests in the society. Both religion and ethics, from a minimal point of view, they have the same ending as their purpose, because being a religious men, like respecting an hereditary traditional faith of free chosen, it is actually the equivalent of the ethical principles (maybe not a total obedience to it, because the morality that is built on religious imperatives, is somehow a part integrated in the ethic's large sense). Looking at a cultural community from the perspective of a tradition, with the above mentioned meaning, as a civilization (Samuel P. Huntington, *The collision of the civilizations*), for example the Christian civilization whose population respects the institutions and the cult it belongs to, we could say that the religious activities (the mass, the mission, the vespers, the sermon etc.) and also the cult objects that they use and also the patrimony that the religious authority of the community has, they all constitute the elements of the Christian cultural civilization. We notice the connection between religion and ethics in their system of values, where the axiological system of the ethics is not too different from the religious one; they are actually complementary. The basic idea of each religion and of each ethical and axiological system is one of good behaviour, and of the respect between others. That is why religion and ethics

⁵ Michael Henry, *Barbaria*, trans. Irina Scurtu, Institutul European, Iași, 2008.

participate to the ensemble of the culture because on the whole they are valuable systems.

Art, as a human activity is a cultural act, not just because it puts at a higher level the “cultural essence” of the “human nature”, but in a special way because through art man represents and reproduces what delights the human soul and ennobles his spirit for a long period of time according to the way of artistic manifestation. Art refers through manifestation, at an aesthetic exercise of manifestation that is built on the following system: artist, art object, and art’s audience.

We could say that we take part of one way of seeing the truth, taking into account the recommendation of understanding the culture. We could also see these three concepts as major values of the culture, but Henry emphasis not only this solution, but also its reverse⁶. Restraining the fundamental concepts or the domain of the culture to only three of them, the most important ones, takes place as a process of universalism, and in this way, what was meant to make it easy through the fusion of defining the culture and activating the cultural ensemble, seems to become a slow bureaucratic instrument. The process of universalism always means an outside one, for example: defining the culture through art, religion and ethics, that means to know the three domains objectively and also the normative systems of understanding them. Respecting the laws of interpretation, comprehension, the quality and authenticity of the indicators and also the ones of procedure and eligibility, all of these are elements that make the cultural act harder to be performed.

The universality leads to a high level of objectivity, which means precision and power of maximizing the cultural act, even though, on the other side, this only leads to a bureaucratic system that is easy to be corrupted and unbalanced. Michael Henry suggests for this an alternative that is called life. As I stated before, barbarism is more volcanic and more energetic than culture, so what Harry suggests seems to be a solution. The system of the three concepts has to be completed with the one of “life” for steam and brightness. This system is not made by the French author, that read the essay, but only after he tried to describe the barbarism and the way it manifests nowadays.

For him barbarism takes place only because there is a crisis that the culture confronts with. The culture never stops being in crises because it always wanted to be separated from barbarism, while barbarism only did the contrary. Crises lead to changes in the axiological systems of those that feel it. If the cultural ensemble is

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 55-60.

always in crises where values change, than barbarism is in the same situation.

Alessandro Baricco explains more things pointing towards the barbarians⁷. If Mattéi makes a reference about the common origin of the barbarism and culture, he is trying to make us understand that we should not blame barbarism, and we should understand its inner source and this way we can stop it. Harry finds a solution where culture is separated from barbarism, and Baricco is using his idea bringing clear and contemporary examples of how to externalize the barbarism.

Samuel P. Huntington in *The collision of the civilization*, writes on almost 100 pages about a fundamental severe problem of the humankind, which is the decadent society and an overreacted demographic explosion⁸. Starting from this point and also from the recent studies about the demographic extinction, Baricco explains barbarism as a phenomena that extents in the societies that are dependent by technology and where technology is expanded.

The violent manifestation of any level of the societies that have a high technology is reflected in the excessive way of using it. So the main characteristic of Baricco's criticism⁹ aims to the ones that use the virtual services mainly. Starting from Google, that gives everyone the opportunity of finding any information and even connecting to the internet all over the world, this made him criticize the mutation that people suffer from by transforming the reality, because behind any virtual identity could be a demon. Baricco also stated that the societies and the violent groups of people that willingly destroy everything wear a mask of civilization¹⁰. This clearly exemplifies the barbarians from the football fields. We could compare this to the roman stadiums where gladiators were fighting just to catch the audience's attention, so the fights would be the football game. This game was called the king's game because it was very important for the audience. In the Medieval Era, people were told that they would get "bread and circus" just to forget about the social problems, the violence from the arena was a way of exteriorizing the latent violence in the human's subconscious, so today football games have the same purpose, to make the human individual forget about his problems, giving him the chance to act violently, curse, yell, scream, whistle, sing and in an organized way he releases the beast from him, that the civilization is holding. The violence from the arena has moved in the football's yard. This is a mutation. If the satisfaction in the past was to kill the other gladiator, today the

⁷ Alessandro Baricco, *Barbarii – Eseu despre mutație*, trans. Dragoș Cojocaru, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2009, pp. 51-55.

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor*, trans. Radu Carp, Antet, Bucharest, pp. 210-230.

⁹ Alessandro Baricco, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-20.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

murder turned into points and victories, money and higher levels of graduation, but the violence also moved in the audience where we deal with hooliganism, fanaticism and any kind of aggression.

Any kind of aggression means above everything modifying the structure. If we take into account the phenomena of barbarism, then we have to consider some examples that have to confirm the fact that: nowadays we assist to the reconfiguration of this point of view and of the values that take place close to their conceptual sphere. What we used to call barbarism it's gone now. The cultural values were not complied because of excessive globalization, that is not the worst thing for the civilization but we should re-evaluate it constructively because of the society that is constantly changing its technology and the way of manifesting its activities¹¹. Once we change the cultural system of values we should also reconfigure the barbarism values. As I have previously say, the externalized barbarism depends on a permanent construction of the civilization, as a way for a culture to relate to another one and to borrow elements of the technological progress, creating and enriching civilizations. The barbarism has to be changed from the inside of the human being, because there is where we get our instincts from and where our natural instincts are crowded by the elements of civilization

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¹¹ Guenon, Rene, *Criza Lumii Moderne*, trans. Anca Manolescu, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2008, pp 34-35.