

Barbarity as the Reverse Side of Civilization

Nelli Motroshilova

The future historian of Russian thought in the 1970s–1980s is hopefully not to disregard the following significant fact: it is during this period that quite a lot of authors actively engaged in the diverse fields of philosophical and sociological studies started to tackle the problems of civilization. Of course, these authors somewhat influenced one another in their problematic interests which seemed very unexpected and non-orthodox for the current Marxist thinking. Yet, rather spontaneously they met at the common theoretical crossroads, being led not by the preset route but rather by the inner logic of their own research, which in an odd way intertwined with the trajectories of their hard personal transformation in the social, cultural and ideological conditions preceding the period of perestroika.

It is noteworthy that this shift of Russian philosophy to undertake a range of problems concerning civilization and barbarity coincided with the processes concurrently unfolding in Western philosophy and sociology. Below I am going to discuss some Western findings in modern civilization studies, placing the focus from the outset on the theme of barbarity as its reverse side.

Contemporary debates about defining barbarity in Western literature

Speaking about chronological synchronism of the new Western and Russian relevant studies, it should be pointed out that these inquiries became particularly intensive first in the late 1980s–early 1990s and then at the turn of the twentieth century. According to expert opinion, ‘great narration’ (the term coined by Jean-François Lyotard) of the modern age, i.e., in fact, of the New Time, was marked by a clear-cut opposition of modern civilization to barbarity as its antipode. It is, however, admitted that the modern civilization/barbarity dichotomy was time and again exploded by some theories advanced during the same modern age. For the contradictions of civilization in the last several centuries were so apparent, that they could not be ignored by the authors of progressist conceptions, let alone the invariably numerous critics of a

Copyright © ICPHS 2009
SAGE: Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore, <http://dio.sagepub.com>
DOI: 10.1177/0392192109336376

modern civilization. Yet, only in the twentieth century did the following thesis come to be generally recognized in philosophy and sociology: barbarity is not anything transcending civilization but its reverse side, an inevitable pole of its various contradictions. However, proving and decoding of this thesis depends on how the concept of 'barbarity' is interpreted which, in turn, is determined by interpreting the concept of 'civilization'. And by the end of the twentieth century, summing up the seemingly endless and heated debates about these concepts, professionals unexpectedly discovered that these concepts still remain obscure and insufficiently clarified. For example, upon going deeper into the history of the concepts of 'barbarity' and 'barbarians', German philosopher and sociologist Claus Offe, had to recognize, first, the fact that these concepts were often missing in specific glossaries and dictionaries and, second, that the infrequently encountered explanations were indistinct and ambiguous. Nevertheless, in his treatise *Modern 'Barbarity': Natural State in Small Format?* Claus Offe has summarized several approaches to defining the concepts presently of interest to us: 'Originally the Greeks, Homer and Herodotus, used to call barbarians the people speaking another language, so called linguistic aliens, with whom we cannot reach understanding either in their or our own language. At that time the Greeks had in mind the inhabitants of Asia Minor, primarily, Persians. Initially, an alien language and alien religious cults, these characteristics of the Barbarians' way of life, implied nothing degrading; as established by philologists, Homer and Herodotus were sometimes even inclined to idealize the Barbarians' (Offe, 1996: 258). The word 'barbarians' got its unmistakably negative connotation in the times of Xerxes and in the course of the Greeks' military confrontation with Persians. Since the fourth century BC the words 'barbarity' and 'barbarians' came to be firmly associated with such attributes as savagery, lack of culture, ignorance, cruelty, and inhumanity. A similar meaning was attached to this concept by the Romans who added one more essential nuance to it by calling barbarians those living in the provinces of the Roman Empire. According to Offe, the New Time witnessed simply 'a rediscovery' of these ancient concepts and their conceptual interpretations since these notions had the widest use in the French socio-philosophical and political literature. Despite the ancient traditions of its usage, the most diverse connotative meanings keep adding to this notion up to the present day.

Upon analyzing the usages of the concepts 'barbarity' and 'barbarian' in 540 books that appeared in different European languages over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Offe discovered that these concepts were equally applied to epochs, phenomena, mental states, actions, behavior, a style of life, etc. Its polysemy revealed itself in defining as 'barbarian' both entire epochs (early human history, slavery), complex phenomena in later history (such as colonialism, militarism, world and civil wars, army dictatorship, fascism, racism, bolshevism, totalitarianism, etc.) and separate actions of the state, society, social groups and individuals (capital punishment, polygamy, Victorian sexual morals, discrimination against homosexuals, and the like). That is why Offe expresses the following doubt: 'Barbarity is not a certain [strictly] introduced sociological concept; and this apparent diversity in its usages poses the question whether it is worthwhile to elevate it to the level of a sociological concept' (Offe, 1996: 262). Yet, eventually this doubt is resolved in favor of further efforts aimed at elucidating the concept in question. To attain greater clarity

it is necessary, according to Offe, to divide the phenomena assigned to barbarity into two groups – those existing prior to [the origin of] civilization and those arising after its emergence. In the first case ‘barbarity’ is more often than not a historical and geographical phenomenon associated with the remotest periods in history or (infrequently) with some territories which at the later historical stages still ‘fell off’ from the development of civilization. In the second case ‘barbarity’ implies ‘self-destruction of civilization’, an abrupt violation of rules and principles of its functioning (Offe, 1996: 263). In the latter cases it is often defined as ‘new’ or ‘modern barbarity’. In the conclusion of his analysis Offe comes to the following definition of barbarity: ‘It stems from the most serious violation of the symbolic or physical integration of individuals and groups of persons; and the actions of involved characters are motivated (in the negative sense) by their decision to set themselves free from the duty imposed on them to justify or explain their behavior, moreover, these characters lay claim to the right of force which is a pole apart from law. This claim for using or undergoing destructive violence would be qualified as “barbarian” [irrespective of who was the first to resort to such destruction and its scope]’ (Offe, 1996: 268).

Lars Clausen, professor of sociology heading the group studies for social cataclysms at Kiel University, agrees with Offe but gives a more precise definition: ‘Barbarity is a specific form of liquidating the values of the entire society arising from the basic disavowal of all these values as a result of radical and rapid social changes – in the conditions of extreme escalation of all actions directed against the body and life [of man] and negatively sanctioned before that’ (Clausen, 1996: 130).

When discussing Offe’s terminological quests, K.-S. Rehberg rightfully points out that his term ‘post-civilization barbarity’ is hardly appropriate and that it would be more accurate to speak about ‘intra-civilization’ barbarity. Rehberg also recalls the well-known authors who used to speak and write about ‘the second barbarity’, e.g., Max Weber or Oswald Spengler (whose views were alien to Max Weber), Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (the latter two, according to Rehberg, in their views come close to Offe’s approach to the problem). In their summing-up of the ideas expressed by many of their colleagues, German sociologists Max Miller and Hans-Georg Soeffner write: ‘It is precisely because the modern society places the focus on the process of civilizing, since (after the ousting of preceding barbarity) its rationality was understood as world domination, as instrumental reason, it has no immunity against inhumanity and barbarity. The potential breakdowns of civilization have been embedded from the outset in the processes of rationalization and bureaucratization of the modern age’ (Miller & Soeffner, 1996: 16). Thus the concept of barbarity turns into a kind of symbol for integrating self-critical reflections of modern society: in contrast to ancient societies regarding barbarians as ‘savagely aliens’ with cruel habits and customs, people today face the fact that ‘we ourselves become barbarians . . .’, that ‘barbarians represent a splinter part of our collective Ego . . .’ (Offe, 1996: 264). According to Offe (1996: 268–269), “‘a strong thesis’ may be expressed as follows: *the assault of civilization against itself, so called barbarity is a process programmed in civilization itself*’ [italics are mine – N. Motroshilova]. ‘Barbarian’ infusions into civilization constitute its characteristics identified with its inevitably arising structural errors.

Now I am going to express my viewpoint on the results and subject of relevant debates. To the regret repeatedly voiced by participants in the various discussions,

the latter failed eventually to provide clear-cut definitions acceptable to the majority, but some essential aspects were nevertheless detected in the conceptual reconstruction of an alarming phenomenon in modern barbarity. We shall rely on these aspects in our further discourse. To my mind, however, the general weak point of these debates lay, first, in the lack of consideration given to the correlation of 'barbarity/civilization' concepts (and, therefore, to the interdependence of definitive elucidation of both concepts) and, second, in the actual identification of barbarity with the most striking acts of violence, destruction and cruelty. Yet, both barbarity itself and the opposition of civilizational and barbarian dimensions inside modern civilization are multivariate and many-sided phenomena. It is worthwhile to sum up at least the main features and specific characteristics of this opposition. I shall base myself on the conception of civilization, which was outlined in my book *The Origin and Evolution of Philosophical Ideas*, as applied there to my analysis of the ancient Greek civilization (Motroshilova, 1991: 22–39), and then developed in Chapter One of my latest book *Civilization and Barbarity in the Modern Age* (Motroshilova, 2007).

1. Civilization is the changed type of man's attitude to nature which in its *design and essence*, in contrast to (pre-civilizational) barbarity, is aimed not at the purging and plundering of natural resources but at their utilization, transformation and, in a sense, multiplication. For that reason precisely civilization came to supersede barbarity, which for many millennia was likely to remain the sole (or chief) means for the existence of ancient people, since the plundering, predatory and devastating effect on the continental human settlements threatened to wipe out the still very weak human race. At that time the emergent civilization appeared, therefore, as a way to its survival. But in the course of subsequent development of civilization it became apparent that the civilizational 'design of nature' (or the design of God?) as regards humanity was realized not through the exclusion of the barbarian (destructive and self-destructive) principle but merely through its certain containment. It is no wonder that the accelerated and expanding effect on nature, characteristic of modern civilization, has led to particularly large-scale barbarian, i.e., unreasonable and harmful, aftereffects, namely, to ecological crises. Hence, one of the most essential hypostases of modern barbarity lies in the actions of individuals, institutions, and countries, which because of environmental abuses entail ecological catastrophes, cruelly 'punishing' the whole of humanity and not only those directly guilty of such abuses (who, by the way, can be easily found in most cases). Unlike in ancient times, when people, upon devastating the previously virgin areas of nature, saved themselves by moving to new regions, humankind today has no such alternative; besides, catastrophes themselves often assume global dimensions.

There is a lot of talking about an ecological crisis. But there is no getting away from the established fact: by the end of the twentieth century humanity has not as yet discovered any effective means for ecological containment and, in spite of all the bombastic ballyhoo, it has failed even to fully realize that the environmental hazard, *ecological barbarism*, is akin to a nuclear threat. And because of this factor human civilization as such may perish or degenerate into something else.

2. In contrast to civilization (according to its design and principle) representing the developing, gradually complicating system of labor distribution aimed in fact at the well-balanced organization, storage, transportation, exchange and consump-

tion of goods and services and intended for meeting the growing requirements of individuals and their communities, the relapses and outbursts of barbarity distort the incentives, forms and results of this process. Not long ago there was an all-round shortage of commodities and services in this country, which presented a striking contrast to the practices prevailing in civilized countries, i.e., real achievements of the civilizational process. Nowadays, thank goodness, we have no commodity shortage to which several generations of our countrymen had become accustomed. But the backwardness and weakness of our domestic industry, a chaotic, speculative and criminal market of goods and services, reveal another deformation, one more manifestation of 'under-civilized civilization' or overt barbarity.

3. A lot of problems have accumulated in the sphere of civilizational interactions associated with the relations of ownership. Once again, in principle and design, private property appeared as a form or structure opposed to the Barbarian's restlessness, disinterestedness, mismanagement and the mode of existence natural for the development of human individuals and indispensable for meeting one's own vital needs and those of their kinfolk, for the stimulation of labor, responsibility, rationality, initiative, etc. Civilization sought and found possibilities for combining private and public forms of ownership in the most optimal way. Meanwhile the ancient barbarian manner of seizing, annihilating, destroying, redistributing and then squandering the others' property has failed not only to disappear from the historical memory of humanity but throughout the entire civilizational history reproduced itself, intruding into the life of people in the form of powerful 'outbursts' of the cruelest, barbarian redistribution of private possessions and property, wealth, power, state frontiers, etc.

In the twentieth century the redistribution of property in this country took place more than once, and in nearly all cases it was carried out in the barbarian manner of rude, unceremonious, criminal seizure and unrestricted illegal rearrangement. Unfortunately, the barbarian cycle has not been completed as yet.

4. In contrast to the fundamental function (design, principle) of civilization seen in providing all the more liberated forms of human coexistence, laid down in legal regulations and moral norms of conduct and granting universal rights, freedoms, guarantees to individuals and possibilities for their participation in determining their own future and the future of a nation, a country, and the world, the barbarian side in the contradictory nature of civilization lies in the infringement, distortion or complete suppression of these rights, freedoms, guarantees, etc. It is valid to call it 'barbarian' because during the historical period of barbarism people had not as yet known or, being barbarians, refused to accept, viewing them as unbinding for themselves, the already existing or emergent standards of social conduct aimed at restraining tyranny and violence against other individuals and their communities. Dramatic tensions in modern history stem from, first, the frequent violation of laws and rules well known to those who violate them and, second, from their justification of such violations over and over again allegedly by the intention 'to restore justice', to overthrow dictatorship and the dictator, 'to uphold freedom and independence' of a nation, and the like. Nonetheless, it could be hardly denied that the forcible violation of human rights and freedoms, including primarily the right to life – no matter under what pretexts it is done, contradicts the essence of civilization and democracy,

as one of its historical gains, and reveals a relapse of barbarity which civilization has failed in the long run to overwhelm.

The need to civilize the political sphere, democracy itself, and to overcome the potentials of barbarity bursting forth in one way or another from democratic structures, particularly in the non-civilized nations inexperienced in democracy, is one of the most pressing problems we had to face in this country where the current developments took a tragic turn. But even the countries with previous invaluable experience in democratic reforms acquired over the course of several centuries or decades, had to face this acute new problem by the late twentieth century. These countries are becoming united, which gives rise to the new alliances of nations and new interstate conflicts. And if one succumbs to the temptation – ‘from the heights of civilization’ and for the sake of democracy – to impose one’s will on other countries and states, does it not put to the test one’s true devotion to civilized relations and methods of activity? For when barbarian violence (say, genocide of entire nations or the violation of rights and freedoms by a certain dictator and his regime) is willingly removed by military operations and bombing, i.e., by violence, bloodshed, destruction (which, by the way, is in fact more detrimental to the ordinary people than to the dictators themselves), in this case barbarity is actually offset not by civilization but by another barbarity, even if it is reinforced by the ‘collective will’, well planned and backed up by applying the most sophisticated technology and, furthermore, the newest refined techniques of ‘legitimization’.

5. If the function of civilization is to provide all the more liberated, non-violent and voluntary forms of individuals’ coexistence and free development of their associations and alliances, barbarity as its inescapable companion reveals itself in the destructive world-wide, regional and local wars as well as in the inability or unwillingness to overcome or alleviate the inevitably arising conflicts by peaceful rather than military means. ‘Barbarian’ groupings, associations and alliances are founded on violence, seizure, destruction, coercion and terror – and it does not matter for the sake of what purposes these really barbarian means are used. ‘Modern barbarians’ include not only those who advocate war and wage it in the interests of private gain, for taking over or retaining the power, striving for ‘racial purity’, etc., but also those who unleash a war in the name of the noblest goals. For a long time it was believed that ‘the stuff is strong when the blood is flowing’, that there were ‘lofty’ aims and reasons for the sake of which it was allowable to sacrifice the lives of other people. Is it not high time to announce decisively that there are none and there cannot be any ideas and goals to justify the initiation of actions that would inevitably lead to war, bloodshed (no matter how small or large-scale it may be), and destruction? And there is no one and there cannot be anyone to be entrusted with an almost transcendent mission to sit in judgment and punish entire nations ‘on behalf of’ civilization.

6. If the specific feature of civilization implies that individuals, peoples and countries, while trying to meet their growing requirements (both bodily and spiritual), make their daily life all the more equipped with the requisite commodities and appliances, all the more orderly, comfortable and easier and, in this sense, all the more worthy of a human person, the ineradicable barbarity reveals itself in desolation, disorder, brutish habits and a boorish way of living, insanitariness, obsolete medicine, the impassibility of roads, the lack of elementary home comforts, the dying-off

of entire regions, towns and villages, and many other aspects of life so familiar, in particular, to the Russians.

7. If the cultural, spiritual, and moral components of civilization involve efforts aimed at creating and using the ideal specimens of material activity, and at adhering to the standards and principles of community life and human communication, barbarity (as rightfully delineated by the abovementioned authors) manifests itself in a forceful violation of legal, social and moral rules and, particularly, in the disregard for the centuries-old work of humanity at their formation and safeguarding. Therefore, though differing from culture as a specific form of activity aimed at creating and translating the ideal values of the most diverse type, civilization in general and in principle is not at all hostile to culture but, moreover, lays down the foundations for the latter since, in its turn, it calls for culture. Quite the reverse, 'barbarity' denotes the contradictory aspects and states of civilization which either directly affect culture for the worse or at least remain indifferent to its requirements. It is justly observed that any acts of barbarity are rooted in the barbarian attitude to humanistic standards and principles.

8. If civilization per se represents in general the continuity of human history (notwithstanding the discontinuity of some civilizational formations) accumulating universal human experience, the concept of barbarity seems to amass the hazards (such as ecological or nuclear catastrophes) which could put an end to the existence of humanity as a whole.

Now let us sum up the above discourse. It is advisable to use the concept of 'intra-civilizational barbarity' in order to outline and summarize those aspects in multiform contradictions of civilization which are fraught with the following: premeditated or unpremeditated violence over nature, resulting in ecological catastrophes ('*ecological barbarism*'); infringements of rights, freedoms, and social norms in political activity, violence and terrorism in state and public activities, regardless of their perpetrators, be it the state, a coalition of states, political parties, groupings or individuals, and no matter what their aims, either base or noble; disregard for civilizational standards of political activity and democratic processes ('*political barbarism*'); violation of moral standards and disrespect for humanistic values recognized in the secular and religious spheres ('*barbarism of immorality*'); preponderance of military objectives and means over a peaceful settlement of conflicts ('*militaristic barbarism*'); 'utter desolation' in daily and private life not befitting human existence ('*everyday barbarism*'). It may be asked what is the use for the terms 'barbarity' and 'barbarian' if the matter involves inner contradictions inherent in civilization. But that is just the point since the historical and genetic roots of civilizational processes can still be traced far back to pre-civilizational and then to intra-civilizational barbarism. It is no wonder that time and again these roots give rise to thistles of barbarity.

The above general observations concern civilization and barbarism taken as a whole – before the division into types of civilization (e.g., into traditional and man-caused civilizations). And now let us return to Western debates and more concrete reflections and studies pertaining to the manifestations of barbarity at the most recent stages in human history.

Some mechanisms of modern barbarity

One of the most characteristic tendencies in contemporary social philosophy and sociology on the subject of causes of modern barbarity involves a search for deeply rooted and long-lasting, specifically, civilizational sources of the 'assaults' and outbreaks of barbarity, i.e., violence and cruelty, with regard to which the twentieth century, known for its dramatic developments, seems to surpass the most bloody centuries in earlier history. In the last few decades this search has over and over again turned on an analysis of inner contradictions and tensions intrinsic to modernity, or the New Time in human history, which (tentatively speaking) in the latter half of the twentieth century turned – not in a smooth but in a conflictual way – into a new historical era termed (to my mind, not very aptly) 'post-modernity'. Let us leave aside the debates about modernity and post-modernity. Here we are to discuss two essential points. First, this is an analysis of the roots of barbarism embedded in modern civilization and, in its most vital forms, undoubtedly surviving up to the present day. Second, it involves deliberations about what had happened to these forms by the turn of the twentieth century and which of them, in particular, gave a powerful impetus to the outbursts of barbarism casting their ominous reflected light on the end of the past century and the past millennium. Let us appraise the relevant studies made by several Western sociologists and philosophers, recognized authorities on the problems of civilization.

Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (1978, 1980, 1986, 1999), professor at Jerusalem University, puts forward a wide-ranging conception of the civilization/barbarity opposition in modern times, the essence of which can be outlined as follows. The potentiality of barbarity lies in the far-reaching transformation of a 'modern programmatic order' as it had manifested itself in the history of the Enlightenment and the Great Revolutions and in those Utopian projects that predominated in the long-lasting European civilizations. In other words, Professor Eisenstadt sees the sources and 'potentials' of barbarity in the key dimensions of combined human experience capable of existing only in unity, which were 'ideologically' detached from this experience, placed into opposition to one another and absolutized. In particular, the borderlines were erected between mind and senses, realized in not just differing but also conflicting 'legitimizations', i.e., justifications and rationalizations of a social order. Among these legitimizations, the principal ones appealed to 'primordial', secular civil and spiritual orders (Eisenstadt, 1996: 97). The general reader may need some clarification of the word 'primordial'. Like the concept of the 'living world', it came to be commonly used in Western literature in the latter half of the twentieth century, being borrowed from the lexicon of Husserl's phenomenology, where 'primordial' (sometimes called *primordial*) denotes all pertaining to the world of 'first order', i.e., to the world of private, individual Ego as a 'monad', initially viewed in (provisional and never completely realized) abstraction from the inter-subjective, i.e., the social and historical world. In particular, the emphasis on the 'primordial' means proximity to the human body, its requirements and reactions, the world of senses, biological and ethnic characteristics of the human Ego, and the like. So, the 'programmatic' order of modernity, according to Eisenstadt, seemed to be connected with the primordial being 'enclosed into brackets' and moved away into the background by social, collec-

tive secular, spiritual and theoretical forms and constellations of human experience, which brought forward (clearly, through the medium of relevant ideologists, theoreticians, politicians, religious authorities, et al.) widely-publicized absolutized and even universalistic claims. Concurrently, this caused great tension between the carriers of 'civil' (secular) and 'transcendental' (religious, ideologized, often Utopian) programs, each of them also promptly raising universalistic claims. Even though the 'primordial' was reduced to marginal importance and devoid of the meanings of a social life, it has neither vanished nor even reconciled itself to its secondary part.

Behind the façade of purely temporary victories of some universalistic programs there took place a frantic struggle of the abovementioned (absolutized) elements of human experience – with alternate gains made at different stages by discrete elements of the primordial such as the 'national', or specific 'secular' elements such as 'general interest' and 'human rights', or spiritual elements such as religious-confessional identification. At the same time each of the absolutized dimensions gave rise to its own mounting tensions. For instance, politics came to predominate in the secular civil sphere, i.e., life became more and more politicized, while in politics, in its turn, opposition was growing between 'revolutionary', 'Jacobinic' (extremely radical totalitarian) and 'procedural', 'routine-pragmatic', reformist tendencies. Along with the existing tension between the delineated lines in European civilization, the modern time was also marked by many more concrete forms of demarcation in the force fields of real history: e.g., between freedom and equality; between the view of an individual as an autonomous, sovereign creature and the treatment of a human being as a non-autonomous link in a social order; between references to law, the legal field, 'universal will' and appeals to individuals' immediate needs, interests, etc. Philosophers are inclined to see primarily conflicting ideas in these constellations. Sociologists are quite right to stress that (almost) every 'purely' ideological shade represents a certain real force and, therefore, bears out the strained relations in concrete socio-historical experience.

According to Eisenstadt, the outbursts of barbarity inevitable both for the present and future of civilization signify that society fails to 'incorporate' various ideas of the modern cultural program and to overcome invariably strong tendencies of certain elements to their self-absolutization, their claims for superiority and supremacy. One more reason is the failure of society, the inability of modern civilization to set up the new structures for social integration and, if not to resolve, at least, to alleviate conflicts provoked by the transformations and challenges at the latest stages of civilization development.

And what are these most recent transformations and challenges? And how does modern humanity meet them? Of course, in view of their multitude it is hardly possible to draw an integral picture of them in a small article. Let me mention only those aspects which, in my opinion, are aptly and thoroughly revealed by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. The studies of modern society and its theoretical comprehension seem to tend to condemn violence in its cruelest, i.e., barbarian forms. According to Bauman, at the current stage it is valid to treat barbarity and violence as synonyms. On the contrary, civilization, or to be more precise, a highly civilized society, is often viewed in close unity, and almost identified with non-violent forms used in running the affairs of society and in the settlement of conflicts. To my mind,

this tendency is most clearly outlined in the following definition: 'Non-violence is the most essential and unmistakable indicator of a level in the moral development of man and society. Concurrently, it is a pragmatic imperative of our times. The entire logical development of a modern civilization leads to the understanding of non-violence as an essential imperative for further progress and prosperity of mankind' (Stepin, 1996: 29). It is hardly possible to disagree that at the turn of the twentieth century this imperative over and over again is defined and viewed as a real challenge.

However, Bauman (and admittedly myself) feel apprehensive about another, no less noticeable tendency, namely, that violence, and moreover, in its extreme, barbarian forms, does not only fail to disappear from human life but even expands the field of its actions. The most striking and shocking side of this tendency is that not only radical elements, such as terrorist groups, resort to extreme violence, but nowadays quite often it is readily used by those who allege that they act as fighters against violence, genocide and violations of human rights. According to Bauman, it is far from being accidental. Furthermore, the very fact of the existing lack of clarity in the concept of barbarity (identified with violence) calls for explanation. 'Violence must be incorporating something that allows it to creep through all the conceptual nets no matter how carefully these have been woven. And this "something" actually exists. The matter involves nothing else but our ambivalence with which we face power, coercion and violence' (Bauman, 1996: 36). The chief point is in the following irrefutable fact: 'The modern age cannot exist without compulsion the same as fish cannot exist out of water' (Bauman, 1996: 36–37). The present-day world accumulates a particularly great potential of energy producing power and force and, therefore, it is constantly and inevitably fraught with coercion and violence. 'Modern consciousness is insincere and it cannot be sincere in the matter concerning coercion and violence' (Bauman, 1996: 38). However, the modern age explicitly makes itself legitimate, i.e., justifies and rationalizes itself as the 'civilizational process', or as a line of development which allows it to soften the rudeness, to polish the cruelty, and assert moral regulation instead of spontaneous behavior. But this rationalization, according to Bauman, is nothing else but propaganda: 'The process of civilization involves not the eradication of violence but its new rearrangement.' In contrast to the earlier period in the New Time, with its focus on the antithesis between reason, the rationale, and the affection, 'central dualism' of the later modern period came to be based on differences and opposition between the well-ordered and disordered, the controllable and uncontrollable, the predictable and unpredictable (in this case, of violence). And it is into the borderline between these dichotomies that civilization made an attempt to transfer a boundary between 'civilizedness' (*Zivilität*) and barbarity. Then the controllable and predictable violence appeared as a certain 'must' of civilization while barbarity – as something diffuse – disordered and spontaneous. Bauman makes use of Yuri Lotman's most expressive metaphor: one way or another the well-ordered, predictable, legitimate violence is similar to the powerful stream of a river, washing away everything in its path but nevertheless (usually) moving along the same solid and familiar river-bed; whereas disordered violence is akin to moving in a minefield, which is fraught with explosions of which no one can predict the location.

A number of ideologists allege that the present-day world is divided into two parts – the so-called civilized countries and the rest of the world, which Bauman opposes in his following formula: ‘Throughout the entire modern history a dividing line between civilization and barbarity has never been identical to the frontiers between national states; it had much less in common with the borders erected by “the civilized part of the world”’ (Bauman, 1996: 42). Hiroshima, Auschwitz, the Gulag provide convincing and horrible evidence of this fact. So, the conclusion drawn by Bauman is that the modern age ‘internalizes’ barbarity. Now barbarity lies not somewhere behind the ‘gates’ of civilization, as they used to believe in the Roman Empire. The whole of human history, especially in the modern age, may be viewed as a history of the ceaseless ‘chronic’ struggle of civilization against barbarity within itself. This struggle is carried on by all the more ingenious, refined means, wherein each individual, paradoxically enough, acts as a soldier of civilization, its adversary, a warrior, and a battlefield, all in one person.

One of the initial conclusions that may be drawn with regards to the Western discussions concerns primarily the last decade of the twentieth century. Sociologists and philosophers attracted attention to the paramount importance of developments that took place in the late 1980s – early 1990s, such as the war in the Persian Gulf or the Bosnian crisis in Yugoslavia (Bonss, 1996: 68). At that time it was not as yet apparent that the matter involved recurrent events and a nearly permanent crisis, but now – after the new bombings, i.e., the resumption of war in the same places on the globe, any doubts are dispelled. As regards the theme of civilization and barbarity, the chief point in these events was likely to amount to the following. Undoubtedly, there occurred outbursts of barbarity in different countries of the world, revealing flagrant totalitarian trampling on the rights and freedoms of individuals and even entire nations. However, the ‘civilized’ countries failed to respond in any other way but by military – barbarian – interference.

Thus, leaving aside all ‘legitimate’ rhetoric, modern barbarity, both in its rude and disguised forms, once again asserted itself in the most potent manner. Philosophers and even sociologists fail to offer some concrete formulas for overcoming or preventing barbarity. Nevertheless, it is within their competence, as well as their task, to comprehend the ‘techniques’ of civilization and barbarity and to promote a clear-cut formulation of civilizational imperatives directed against any types of barbarism.

Nelli Motroshilova

Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences

Translated from the Russian into English by Romela Kokhanovskaya

References

- Bauman, Z. (1996) ‘Gewalt – modern und postmodern’, in Miller and Soeffner (1996), pp. 36–67.
Bonss, W. (1996) ‘Gewalt als gesellschaftliches Problem’, in Miller and Soeffner (1996), pp. 68–95.
Clausen, L. (1996) *Barbarei und Eisenstadt*, in Miller and Soeffner (1996), pp. 130–136.
Eisenstadt, S. N. (1978) *Revolution and Transformation of Societies: A Comparative Study of Civilizations*. New York: Free Press.

- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1980) *The Axial Age, Rise of Transcendental Visions, The Emergence of Intellectuals and of Clerics, and the Structuring of World History*. S.L.: s.n.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1986) *The Origin and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1996) 'Barbarei und Moderne', in Miller and Soeffner (1996), pp. 96–117.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1999) *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fedotova, V. G. (1997) *Модернизация «другой» Европы*. Moscow.
- Miller, M. and Soeffner, H.-G. (1996) *Modernität und Barbarei. Soziologische Zeitdiagnose am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Motroshilova, N. V. (1991) «Цивилизация и цивилизованность», in *Рождение и развитие философских идей*. Moscow.
- Motroshilova, N. V. (2007) *Цивилизация и варварство в современную эпоху*. Moscow.
- Nunner-Winkler, G. (1996) 'Gewalt – ein Spezifikum der Moderne', in Miller and Soeffner (1996), pp. 81–95.
- Offe, C. (1996) 'Moderne "Barbarei": Der Naturzustand im Kleinformat', in Miller and Soeffner (1996), pp. 258–289.
- Poliakov, L. (1998) *Путь России в современность: модернизация как деархаизация*. Moscow.
- Stepin, V. S. (1996) *Эпоха перемен и сценарии будущего*. Moscow.