

## Barbarism: A User's Guide

I have called my lecture 'Barbarism, A User's Guide', not because I wish to give you instructions in how to be barbarians.<sup>1</sup> None of us, unfortunately, need it. Barbarism is not something like ice-dancing, a technique that has to be learned—at least not unless you wish to become a torturer or some other specialist in inhuman activities. It is rather a by-product of life in a particular social and historical context, something that comes with the territory, as Arthur Miller says in *Death of a Salesman*. The term 'street-wise' expresses what I want to say all the better for indicating the actual adaptation of people to living in a society without the rules of civilization. By understanding this word we have all adapted to living in a society that is, by the standards of our grandparents or parents, even—if we are as old as I am—of our youth, uncivilized. We have got used to it. I don't mean we can't still be shocked by this or that example of it. On the contrary, being periodically shocked by something unusually awful is part of the experience. It helps to conceal how used we have become to the normality of what our—certainly my—parents

would have considered life under inhuman conditions. My user's guide is, I hope, a guide to understanding how this has come about.

The argument of this lecture is that, after about a hundred and fifty years of secular decline, barbarism has been on the increase for most of the twentieth century, and there is no sign that this increase is at an end. In this context I understand 'barbarism' to mean two things. First, the disruption and breakdown of the systems of rules and moral behaviour by which *all* societies regulate the relations among their members and, to a lesser extent, between their members and those of other societies. Second, I mean, more specifically, the reversal of what we may call the project of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, namely the establishment of a *universal* system of such rules and standards of moral behaviour, embodied in the institutions of states dedicated to the rational progress of humanity: to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, to Equality, Liberty and Fraternity or whatever. Both are now taking place and reinforce each other's negative effects on our lives. The relation of my subject to the question of human rights should therefore be obvious.

Let me clarify the first form of barbarization, i.e. what happens when traditional controls disappear. Michael Ignatieff, in his recent *Blood and Belonging*, notes the difference between the gunmen of the Kurdish guerrillas in 1993 and those of the Bosnian checkpoints. With great perception he sees that in the stateless society of Kurdistan, every male child reaching adolescence gets a gun. Carrying a weapon simply means that a boy has ceased to be a child and must behave like a man. 'The accent of meaning in the culture of the gun thus stresses responsibility, sobriety, tragic duty.' Guns are fired when they need to be. On the contrary, most Europeans since 1945, including in the Balkans, have lived in societies where the state enjoyed a monopoly of legitimate violence. As the states broke down, so did that monopoly. 'For some young European males, the chaos that resulted from [this collapse] . . . offered the chance of entering an erotic paradise of the all-is-permitted. Hence the semi-sexual, semi-pornographic gun culture of the checkpoints. For young men there was an irresistible erotic charge in holding lethal power in your hands' and using it to terrorize the helpless.<sup>2</sup>

I suspect that a good many of the atrocities now committed in the civil wars of three continents reflect this type of disruption, which is characteristic of the late twentieth-century world. But I hope to say a word or two about this later.

### The Defence of Enlightenment

As to the second form of barbarization, I wish to declare an interest. I believe that one of the few things that stands between us and an accelerated descent into darkness is the set of values inherited from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. This is not a fashionable view at this moment, when the Enlightenment can be dismissed as anything from

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<sup>1</sup> This article was given by Eric Hobsbawm as a talk on 24 February 1994 in this year's series of Oxford Amnesty Lectures.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, London 1993, pp. 140–1.

superficial and intellectually naive to a conspiracy of dead white men in periwigs to provide the intellectual foundation for Western imperialism. It may or may not be all that, but it is also the only foundation for all the aspirations to build societies fit for *all* human beings to live in anywhere on this Earth, and for the assertion and defence of their human rights as persons. In any case, the progress of civility which took place from the eighteenth century until the early twentieth was achieved overwhelmingly or entirely under the influence of the Enlightenment, by governments of what are still called, for the benefit of history students, 'enlightened absolutists', by revolutionaries and reformers, Liberals, Socialists, and Communists, all of whom belonged to the same intellectual family. It was not achieved by its critics. This era when progress was not merely supposed to be both material and moral but actually was, has come to an end. But the only criterion which allows us to judge rather than merely to record the consequent descent into barbarism, is the old rationalism of the Enlightenment.

Let me illustrate the width of the gap between the period before 1914 and ours. I will not dwell on the fact that we, who have lived through greater inhumanity, are today likely to be less shocked by the modest injustices that outraged the nineteenth century. For instance, a single miscarriage of justice in France (the Dreyfus case) or twenty demonstrators locked up for one night by the German army in an Alsatian town (the Zabern incident of 1913). What I want to remind you of is standards of conduct. Clausewitz, writing after the Napoleonic wars, took it for granted that the armed forces of civilized states did not put their prisoners of war to death or devastate countries. The most recent wars in which Britain was involved, that is to say the Falklands war and the Gulf war, suggest that this is no longer taken for granted. Again, to quote the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 'civilized warfare, the textbooks tell us, is confined, as far as possible, to the disablement of the armed forces of the enemy; otherwise war would continue till one of the parties was exterminated. "It is with good reason"—and here the *Encyclopedia* quotes Vattel, an international lawyer of the noble eighteenth-century Enlightenment—"that this practice has grown in a custom within the nations of Europe".' It is no longer a custom of the nations of Europe or anywhere else. Before 1914 the view that war was against combatants and not non-combatants was shared by rebels and revolutionaries. The programme of the Russian Narodnaya Volya, the group which killed Tsar Alexander II, stated 'explicitly that individuals and groups standing outside its fight against the government would be treated as neutrals, their person and property were to be inviolate.'<sup>3</sup> At about the same time Frederick Engels condemned the Irish Fenians (with whom all his sympathies lay) for placing a bomb in Westminster Hall, thus risking the lives of innocent bystanders. War, he felt as an old revolutionary with experience of armed conflict, should be waged against combatants and not against civilians. Today this limitation is no more recognized by revolutionaries and terrorists than by governments waging war.

I will now suggest a brief chronology of this slide down the slope of

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<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Gerhard Hirschfeld, *Sozialprotest, Gewalt, Terror*, Stuttgart 1982, p. 56.

barbarization. Its main stages are four: the First World War, the period of world crisis from the breakdown of 1917–20 to that of 1944–47; the four decades of the Cold War era, and lastly, the general breakdown of civilization as we know it over large parts of the world in and since the 1980s. There is an obvious continuity between the first three stages. In each the earlier lessons of man's inhumanity to man were learned and became the basis of new advances in barbarism. There is no such linear connection between the third and the fourth stage. The breakdown of the 1980s and 1990s is not due to the actions of human decision-makers which could be recognized as being barbarous, like the projects of Hitler and the terror of Stalin, lunatic, like the arguments justifying the race to nuclear war, or both, like Mao's Cultural Revolution. It is due to the fact that the decision-makers no longer know what to do about a world that escapes from their, or our control, and that the explosive transformation of society and economy since 1950 produced an unprecedented breakdown and disruption of the rules governing behaviour in human societies. The third and fourth stages therefore overlap and interact. Today human societies are breaking down, but under conditions when the standards of public conduct remain at the level to which the earlier periods of barbarization have reduced them. They have not so far shown serious signs of rising again.

There are several reasons why the First World War began the descent into barbarism. First, it opened the most murderous era so far recorded in history. Zbigniew Brzezinski has recently estimated the 'megadeaths' between 1914 and 1990 at 187 million, which—however speculative—may serve as a reasonable order of magnitude. I calculate that this corresponds to something like 9 per cent of the world's population in 1914. We have got used to killing. Second, the limitless sacrifices which governments imposed on their own men as they drove them into the holocaust of Verdun and Ypres set a sinister precedent, if only for imposing even more unlimited massacres on the enemy. Third, the very concept of a war of total national mobilization shattered the central pillar of civilized warfare, the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. World War I was the first war to be waged specifically against the enemy's civilian populations, though civilians were not yet the primary target for guns and bombs. Once again, this was an ominous precedent. Fourth, World War I was the first major war, at all events in Europe, waged under conditions of democratic politics by, or with the active participation of, the entire population. Unfortunately democracies can rarely be mobilized by wars when these are seen merely as incidents in the international power-game, as old-fashioned foreign offices saw them to be. Nor do they fight them like bodies of professional soldiers or boxers, for whom war is an activity that does not require hating the enemy, so long as he fights by the professional rules. Democracies, as experience shows, require demonized enemies. This, as the Cold War was to demonstrate, facilitates barbarization. Finally, the Great War ended in social and political breakdown, social revolution and counter-revolution on an unprecedented scale.

This era of breakdown and revolution dominated the thirty years after 1917. The twentieth century became, among other things, an era of

religious wars between a capitalist liberalism, on the defensive and in retreat until 1947, and both Soviet Communism and movements of the fascist type, which also wished to destroy each other. Actually the only real threat to liberal capitalism in its heartlands, apart from its own breakdown after 1914, came from the Right. Between 1920 and Hitler's fall no regime *anywhere* was overthrown by communist or socialist revolution. But the communist threat, being to property and social privilege, was more frightening. This was not a situation conducive to the return of civilized values. All the more so, since the War had left behind a black deposit of ruthlessness and violence, and a substantial body of men experienced in both and attached to both. Many of them provided the manpower for an innovation, for which I can find no real precedent before 1914, namely quasi-official or tolerated strong-arm and killer squads which did the dirty work governments were not yet ready to do officially: *Freikorps*, Black-and-Tans, *squadristi*. In any case violence was on the rise. The enormous surge in political assassinations after the War has long been noticed, for instance by the Harvard historian Franklin Ford. Again, there is no precedent that I know before 1914 for the bloody street-fighting between organized political opponents which became so common in both Weimar Germany and Austria in the late 1920s. And where there had been a precedent, it was almost trivial. The Belfast riots and battles of 1921 killed more people than had been killed in the entire nineteenth century in that tumultuous city: 428 lives. And yet the street-corner battlers were not necessarily old soldiers with a taste for war, though 57 per cent of the early membership of the Italian Fascist party were. Three-quarters of the Nazi storm-troopers of 1933 were too young to have been in the War. War, quasi-uniforms (the notorious coloured shirts) and gun-carrying now provided a model for the dispossessed young.

I have suggested that history after 1917 was to be that of wars of religion. 'There is no true war but religious war' wrote one of the French officers who pioneered the barbarism of French Algerian counter-insurgency policy in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Yet what made the cruelty which is the natural result of religious wars more brutal and inhuman, was that the cause of Good (i.e. of Western great powers) was confronted with the cause of Evil represented, most commonly, by people whose very claim to full humanity was rejected. Social revolution, and especially colonial rebellion, challenged the sense of a *natural*, as it were a divine or cosmically sanctioned superiority of top people over bottom people in societies which were naturally unequal, whether by birth or by achievement. Class wars, as Mrs Thatcher reminded us, are usually conducted with more rancour from the top than from the bottom. The very idea that people whose perpetual inferiority is a datum of nature, especially when made manifest by skin colour, should claim equality with, let alone rebel against, their natural superiors, was an outrage in itself. If this was true of the relation between upper and lower classes, it was even more true of that between races. Would General Dyer in 1919 have ordered his men to fire into a crowd, killing 379 people, if the crowd had been English or even Irish and not Indian, or the place Glasgow and not Amritsar? Almost certainly not. The barbarism of Nazi Germany was far

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla: A Historical and Critical Study*, London 1977, p. 374.

greater against Russians, Poles, Jews and other peoples considered subhuman than against West Europeans.

And yet, the ruthlessness implicit in relations between those who supposed themselves to be 'naturally' superior and their supposedly 'natural' inferiors, merely speeded up the barbarization latent in any confrontation between God and Devil. For in such apocalyptic face-offs there can be only one outcome: total victory or total defeat. Nothing could conceivably be worse than the Devil's triumph. As the Cold War phrase went, 'Better dead than red,' which, in any literal sense, is an absurd statement. In such a struggle the end necessarily justified *any* means. If the only way to beat the Devil was by devilish means, that is what we had to do. Why, otherwise, would the mildest and most civilized of Western scientists have urged their governments to build the atom bomb? If the other side is devilish, then we must assume that they will use devilish means, even if they are not doing so now. I am not arguing that Einstein was wrong to regard a victory by Hitler as an ultimate evil, but merely trying to clarify the logic of such confrontations, which necessarily led to the mutual escalation of barbarism. That is rather clearer in the case of the Cold War. The argument of Kennan's famous 'Long Telegram' of 1946 which provided the ideological justification of the Cold War, was no different from what British diplomats had constantly said about Russia throughout the nineteenth century: we must contain them, if need be by the threat of force, or they will advance on Constantinople and the Indian frontier. But during the nineteenth century the British government rarely lost its cool about this. Diplomacy, the 'great game' between secret agents, even the occasional war, were not confused with the apocalypse. After the October Revolution they were. Palmerston would have shaken his head; in the end, I think, Kennan himself did.

It is easy to see why civilization receded between the Treaty of Versailles and the fall of the bomb on Hiroshima. The fact that World War II, unlike World War I, was fought on one side by belligerents who specifically rejected the values of nineteenth-century civilization and the Enlightenment, speaks for itself. We may need to explain why nineteenth-century civilization did not recover from World War I, as many expected it to do. But we know it didn't. It entered upon an age of catastrophe: of wars followed by social revolutions, of the end of empires, of the collapse of the liberal world economy, the steady retreat of constitutional and democratic governments, the rise of fascism and Nazism. That civilization receded is not very surprising, especially when we consider that the period ended in the greatest school of barbarism of all, the Second World War. So let me pass over the age of catastrophe and turn to what is both a depressing and a curious phenomenon, namely the advance of barbarism in the West after World War II. So far from an age of catastrophe, the third quarter of the twentieth century was an era of triumph for a reformed and restored liberal capitalism, at least in the core countries of the 'developed market economies'. It produced both solid political stability and unparalleled economic prosperity. And yet, barbarization continued. Let me take, as a case in point, the distasteful subject of torture.

## The Resurgence of Torture

As I need not tell you, at various times from 1782 on, torture was formally eliminated from judicial procedure in civilized countries. In theory it was no longer tolerated in the state's coercive apparatus. The prejudice against it was so strong that torture did not return after the defeat of the French Revolution, which had, of course, abolished it. The famous or infamous Vidocq, the ex-convict turned police chief under the Restoration, and model for Balzac's character Vautrin, was totally without scruples, but he did not torture. One may suspect that in the corners of traditional barbarism that resisted moral progress—for instance in military prisons or similar institutions—it did not quite die out, or at any rate its memory didn't. I am struck by the fact that the basic form of torture applied by the Greek colonels in 1967–74 was, in effect, the old Turkish *bastinado*—variations on beating the soles of the feet—even though no part of Greece had been under Turkish administration for almost fifty years. We may also take it that civilized methods lagged where governments fought subversives, as in the tsarist Okhrana.

The major progress of torture between the wars was under Communist and fascist regimes. Fascism, uncommitted to the Enlightenment, practised it fully. The Bolsheviks like the Jacobins formally abolished the methods used by the Okhrana, but almost immediately founded the Cheka, which recognized no restraints in its fight to defend the revolution. However, a circular telegram by Stalin in 1939 suggests that after the Great War 'application of methods of physical pressure in NKVD practice' was not officially legitimized until 1937, that is to say it was legitimized as part of the Stalinist Great Terror. In fact it became compulsory in certain cases. These methods were to be exported to the European Soviet satellites after 1945, but we may take it that there were policemen in these new regimes who had experience of such activities in the regimes of Nazi occupation.

Nevertheless, I am inclined to think that Western torture did not learn much from, or imitate, Soviet torture, although techniques of mental manipulation may have owed more to the Chinese techniques of what journalists baptised 'brainwashing' when they came across it during the Korean War. Almost certainly the model was fascist torture, particularly as practised in the German repression of resistance movements during the War. However, we should not underestimate the readiness to learn even from the concentration camps. As we now know, thanks to the disclosures of President Clinton's administration, the USA engaged, from shortly after the War until well into the 1970s, in systematic radiation experiments on human beings, chosen from among those felt to be of socially inferior value. These were, like the Nazi experiments, conducted or at least monitored by medical doctors, a profession whose members, I must say it with regret, too often allowed themselves to be involved in the practice of torture in all countries. At least one of the American medical men who found these experiments distasteful protested to his superiors that there seemed to be 'a smell of Buchenwald' to them. It is safe to assume that he was not the only one to be aware of the similarity.

Let me now bring in Amnesty, for whose benefit these lectures are held. This organization, as you know, was founded in 1961, mainly to protect

political and other prisoners of conscience. To their surprise these excellent men and women discovered that they also had to deal with the systematic use of torture by governments—or barely disguised agencies of government—in countries in which they had not expected to find it. Perhaps only Anglo-Saxon provincialism accounts for their surprise. The use of torture by the French army during the Algerian war of independence, 1954–62, had long caused political uproar in France. So Amnesty had to concentrate much of its effort on torture and its 1975 Report on the subject remains fundamental.<sup>5</sup> Two things about this phenomenon were striking. In the first place its systematic use in the democratic West was novel, even allowing for the odd precedent of electric cattle-prods in Argentinian jails after 1930. The second striking fact was that the phenomenon was now *purely Western*, at all events in Europe, as the Amnesty Report noted. ‘Torture as a government-sanctioned Stalinist practice has ceased. With a few exceptions . . . no reports of torture in Eastern Europe have been reaching the outside world in the past decade.’ This is perhaps less surprising than it looks at first sight. Since the life-and-death struggle of the Russian Civil War, torture in the USSR—as distinct from the general brutality of Russian penal life—had not served to protect the security of the state. It served other purposes, such as the construction of show trials and similar forms of public theatre.

It declined and fell with Stalinism. Fragile as the Communist systems turned out to be, only a limited, even a nominal, use of armed coercion was necessary to maintain them from 1957 until 1989. On the other hand it *is* more surprising that the period from the mid 1950s to the late 1970s should have been the classic era of Western torturing, reaching its peak in the first half of the seventies, when it flourished simultaneously in Mediterranean Europe, in several countries of Latin America with a hitherto unblemished record—Chile and Uruguay are cases in point—in South Africa and even, though without the application of electrodes to genitals, in Northern Ireland. I should add that the curve of Western official torturing has dipped substantially since then, partly, one hopes, because of the labours of Amnesty. Nevertheless, the 1992 edition of the admirable *World Human Rights Guide* records it in 62 out of the 104 countries it surveyed and gave only fifteen a completely clean bill of health.

How are we to explain this depressing phenomenon? Certainly not by the official rationalization of the practice, as stated in the British Compton Committee, which reported rather ambiguously on Northern Ireland in 1972. It talked about ‘information which it was operationally necessary to obtain as rapidly as possible.’<sup>6</sup> But this was no explanation. It was merely another way of saying that governments had given way to barbarism, i.e. that they no longer accepted the convention that prisoners of war are not obliged to tell their captors more than name, rank and number, and that more information would *not* be tortured out of them, however urgent the operational necessity.

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<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, *Report on Torture*, London 1975.

<sup>6</sup> *Report on Torture*, p. 108.



I suggest that three factors are involved. The post-1945 Western barbarization took place against the background of the lunacies of the Cold War, a period which will one day be as hard to understand for historians as the witch craze of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I shall not say more about it here, except to note that the extraordinary assumption that only the readiness to launch the nuclear holocaust at a moment's notice preserved the Western world from immediate overthrow by totalitarian tyranny, was enough in itself to undermine all accepted standards of civility. Again, Western torturing clearly developed first, on a significant scale, as part of the doomed attempt by a colonial power, or at all events the French armed forces, to preserve its empire in Indochina and North Africa. Nothing was more likely to barbarize than the suppression of inferior races by the forces of a state which had recently experienced suppression by Nazi Germany and its collaborators. It is perhaps significant that, following the French example, systematic torture elsewhere seems later to have been primarily carried out by the military rather than the police.

In the 1960s, following the Cuban revolution and the student radicalization, a third element entered the situation. This was the rise of new insurrectionary and terrorist movements which were essentially attempts by volunteer minority groups to create revolutionary situations by acts of will. The essential strategy of such groups was polarization: either by demonstrating that the enemy regime was no longer in control, or—where the situation was less favourable—by provoking it into general repression, they hoped to drive the hitherto passive masses to support the rebels. Both variants were dangerous. The second was an open invitation for a sort of mutual escalation of terror and counter-terror. It took a very level-headed government to resist; even the British in Northern Ireland did not keep their cool in the early years. Several regimes, especially military ones, did not resist. I need hardly add that in a contest of comparative barbarism the forces of the state were likely to win—and they did.

But a sinister air of unreality surrounded these underground wars. Except in the remaining struggles for colonial liberation, and perhaps in Central America, the fights were for smaller stakes than either side pretended. The socialist revolution of the various left-wing terrorist brigades was not on the agenda. Their actual chances of defeating and overthrowing existing regimes by insurrection were insignificant, and known to be so. What reactionaries were really afraid of was not students with guns but mass movements which, like Allende in Chile and the Peronists in Argentina, could win elections, as the gunmen could not. The example of Italy demonstrates that routine politics could go on almost as before, even in the presence of the strongest force of such insurrectionaries in Europe, the Red Brigades. The main achievement of the neo-insurrectionaries was thus to allow the general level of force and violence to be ratcheted up by a few notches. The 1970s left behind torture, murder and terror in formerly democratic Chile, where its object was not to protect a military regime which ran no risk of overthrow, but to teach the poor humility and to instal a system of free-market economics safe from political opposition and trade unions. In relatively pacific Brazil, not a naturally bloodthirsty culture like Colombia or Mexico, it left a heritage of death squads of

policemen, scouring the streets to liquidate 'anti-socials' and the lost children of the pavements. It left behind, almost everywhere in the West, doctrines of 'counter-insurgency' which I can sum up in the words of one of the authors who surveyed these writings: 'Dissatisfaction there is always, but resistance only has a chance of success against a liberal-democratic regime, or an old-fashioned, ineffectual authoritarian system.'<sup>7</sup> In short, the moral of the 1970s was that barbarism is more effective than civilization. It has permanently weakened the constraints of civilization.

Let me finally turn to the current period. The wars of religion in their characteristic twentieth-century form are more or less over, even though they have left behind a sub-stratum of public barbarity. We may find ourselves returning towards wars of religion in the old sense, but let me leave aside this further illustration of the retreat of civilization. The current turmoil of nationalist conflicts and civil wars is not to be regarded as an ideological phenomenon at all, and still less as the re-emergence of primordial forces too long suppressed by Communism or Western universalism, or whatever else the current self-serving jargon of the militants of identity politics calls it. It is, in my view, a response to a double collapse: the collapse of political order as represented by functioning states—*any* effective state which stands watch against the descent into Hobbesian anarchy—and the crumbling of the old frameworks of social relations over a large part of the world—*any* framework which stands guard against Durkheimian *anomie*.

I believe the horrors of the current civil wars are a consequence of this double collapse. They are not a return to ancient savageries, however long ancestral memories may be in the mountains of Hercegovina and Krajina. The Bosnian communities were not prevented from cutting each others' throats by the force majeure of a Communist dictatorship. They lived together peacefully and, at least among the 50 per cent or so of the urban Yugoslav population, intermarried to a degree inconceivable in really segregated societies like Ulster or the racial communities of the USA. If the British state had abdicated in Ulster as the Yugoslav state did, we would have had a lot more than some three thousand dead in a quarter of a century. Moreover, as Michael Ignatieff has brought out very well, the atrocities of this war are largely committed by a typically contemporary form of the 'dangerous classes', namely deracinated young males between the ages of puberty and marriage, for whom no accepted or effective rules and limits of behaviour exist any longer: not even the accepted rules of violence in a traditional society of macho fighters.

And this, of course, is what links the explosive collapse of political and social order on the periphery of our world system, with the slower subsidence in the heartlands of developed society. In both regions unspeakable things are done by people who no longer have social guides to action. The old traditional England which Mrs Thatcher did so much to bury relied on the enormous strength of custom and convention. One did, not what 'ought to be' done, but what *was* done: as the phrase went,

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 377.

‘the done thing’. But we no longer know what ‘the done thing’ is, there is only ‘one’s own thing’.

Under these circumstances of social and political disintegration, we should expect a decline in civility in any case, and a growth in barbarism. And yet what has made things worse, what will undoubtedly make them worse in future, is that steady dismantling of the defences which the civilization of the Enlightenment had erected against barbarism, and which I have tried to sketch in this lecture. For the worst of it is that we have got used to the inhuman. We have learned to tolerate the intolerable.

Total war and cold war have brainwashed us into accepting barbarity. Even worse: they have made barbarity seem unimportant, compared to more important matters like making money. Let me conclude with the story of one of the last advances of nineteenth-century civilization, namely the banning of chemical and biological warfare—weapons essentially designed for terror, for their actual operational value is low. By virtually universal agreement they were banned after World War I under the Geneva Protocol of 1925, due to come into force in 1928. The ban held good through World War II, except, naturally, in Ethiopia. In 1987 it was contemptuously and provocatively torn up by Saddam Hussein, who killed several thousands of his citizens with poison-gas bombs. Who protested? Only the old ‘stage army of the good’, and not even all of these—as those of us who tried to collect signatures at the time know. Why so little outrage? In part, because the absolute rejection of such inhuman weapons had long been quietly abandoned. It had been softened down to a pledge not to be the first to use such weapons, but, of course, if the other side used them . . . Over forty states, headed by the USA, took this position on the 1969 UN resolution against chemical warfare. Opposition to biological warfare remained stronger. Its means were to be totally destroyed under an agreement of 1972: but not chemical ones. We might say that poison gas had been quietly domesticated. Poor countries now saw it simply as a possible counter to nuclear arms. Still, it was terrible. And yet—need I remind you—the British and other governments of the democratic and liberal world, so far from protesting, kept quiet and did their best to keep their citizens in the dark, as they encouraged their businessmen to sell Saddam more arms including the equipment to gas more of his citizens. They were not outraged, until he did something genuinely insupportable. I don’t need to remind you what he did: he attacked the oil fields thought vital by the USA.

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Homi Bhabha. *Barbarism: A User's Guide*. Article. Jan 1994. "A superb book; and" in a way that goes beyond what being good as a book usually implies—it is a kind of gift to its own culture, a guide to the perplexed. It is lucid, usually fair, laced with a certain feminist mockery and animated by some surprising sympathies." Arthur C. Danto, *New York Times Book Review* "An impassioned exploration of the deep waters beneath Western primitivism. . . . Barbarism refers to a non standard word, expression or pronunciation in a language. [Usage note: the term barbarism is contrasted with barbarity as the two terms have different meaning. Barbarism specifically indicates a misuse of language, but] Barbarism refers to a non-standard word, expression or pronunciation in a language. [Usage note: the term "barbarism" is contrasted with "barbarity" as the two terms have different meaning. "Barbarism" specifically indicates a misuse of language, but also more generally indicates "culturally lacking in refinement or distinction." In contrast, "barbarity" indicates "a severity of cruelty or brutality" that is generally unacceptable among a civilized people. (See etymology note "infra").] Adjective: barbarous. Also known as barbarolexis. "The term barbarism," says Maria Boletsi, "is associated with unintelligibility, lack of understanding, and mis- or noncommunication." Observation. Maria Boletsi The term 'barbarism' is associated with unintelligibility, lack of understanding, and mis- or noncommunication. Patricia Palmer Europe had long practice in attaching the epithet 'barbarous' to 'tongue' and, through that pairing, making language a key term in defining 'barbarism...' Barbarism itself, etymologically rooted in barbaros, the babbling outsider unable to speak Greek, is 'a concept grounded in linguistic difference' The concept of the 'barbarous tongue' presupposes, at a stroke, a hierarchy of both languages and societies. I have called my lecture "Barbarism, A User's Guide", not because I wish to give you instructions in how to be barbarians. [1] None of us, unfortunately, need it. Barbarism is not something like ice-dancing, a technique that has to be learned—at least not unless you wish to become a torturer or some other specialist in inhuman activities. It is rather a by-product of life in a particular social and historical context, something that comes with the territory, as Arthur Miller says in *Death of a Salesman*. The term "street-wise" expresses what I want to say all the better for indicating the actual He spoke of his taste for things "big and simple, barbaric, if you like," and boasted that he conducted himself "on the basis of a barbarian" (Millin 165, 242). His famous scholarships designed to turn out men fit for imperial mastery required success in "manly outdoor sports," a criterion Rhodes privately called the proof of "brutality" (Stead 39). Yet while Rhodes celebrated qualities he called barbaric or brutal, his adversaries seized upon the same rhetoric to revile him. During the Boer War, for instance, the tactics by which Rhodes and his friends tightened their grip on South Africa