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Constructing the 'Other' within the Context of Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and the Civilizing Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the historical continuity and ideological function of the "civilizing mission" as a discursive instrument through which the West has sustained its epistemic dominance over the East. Tracing the genealogy of this discourse from Classical Greek representations of the barbarian to modern imperialism, the article demonstrates how Eurocentric historiography systematically legitimized Western superiority. Drawing on Foucault's *knowledge–power nexus*, Gramsci's *theory of hegemony*, Said's *Orientalism*, and Goody's "*theft of history*", the study argues that historiography functions as a site where power relations are naturalized—most notably by constructing the Middle Ages as "dark" while obscuring the flourishing of the Islamic world. A central contribution of this research is its analysis of the Russian Empire's paradoxical position. It reveals how Russia, historically situated as the "Other Europe", internalized and reproduced the same civilizing discourse in its colonial expansion into the Caucasus and Turkestan (Central Asia). Through an analysis of military reports and travel narratives, the article illustrates how Russian imperial ideology deployed notions of savagery and irrationality to legitimize conquest and Russification. Ultimately, the study contends that contemporary interventions framed in the language of democracy and human rights continue to echo these earlier missions, and advocates for a pluralistic historiography that challenges the hierarchical narratives shaping Western conceptions of civilization.

Avrupa-Merkezcilik, Oryantalizm ve Medenileştirme Söylemi Bağlamında 'Öteki'nin İnşası

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Batı'nın Doğu üzerindeki epistemik tahakkümünü sürdürmesini sağlayan söylemsel bir araç olarak "medenileştirme misyonu"nun tarihsel sürekliliğini ve ideolojik işlevini incelemektedir. "Barbar" kavramının Antik Yunan'daki temsillerinden modern emperyalizme uzanan soykütüğünü izleyen makale, Avrupa merkezci tarihyazımının Batı üstünlüğünü nasıl sistematik olarak meşrulaştırdığını ortaya koymaktadır. Foucault'nun *bilgi-iktidar ilişkisi*, Gramsci'nin *hegemonya teorisi*, Said'in *Oryantalizm*'i ve Goody'nin "*tarih hırsızlığı*" kavramlarından yararlanan çalışma; tarih yazımının, özellikle Orta Çağ'ı "karanlık" olarak kurgulayıp İslam dünyasının yükselişini gizleyerek iktidar ilişkilerinin doğallaştırıldığı bir alan olarak işlev gördüğünü savunmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın önemli katkısı, Rus İmparatorluğu'nun paradoksal konumunun analizidir. Makale, tarihsel olarak "Öteki Avrupa" şeklinde konumlandırılan Rusya'nın, Kafkasya ve Türkistan'daki (Orta Asya) sömürgeci yayılması sırasında aynı medenileştirme söylemini nasıl içselleştirip yeniden ürettiğini göstermektedir. Askeri raporlar ve seyahatnamelerin analizi yoluyla çalışma, Rus emperyal ideolojisinin işgal ve Ruslaştırma politikalarını meşrulaştırmak için vahşilik ve irrasyonellik kavramlarını nasıl kullandığını resmetmektedir. Sonuç olarak çalışma, demokrasi ve insan hakları diliyle çerçevelenen güncel müdahalelerin bu eski misyonları yankılamaya devam ettiğini ileri sürmekte ve Batı'nın medeniyet algısını şekillendiren hiyerarşik anlatılara meydan okuyan çoğulcu bir tarih yazımını savunmaktadır.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the relationship between the West and the East has been defined not only by economic interdependence but also by a systematic construction of identity. The West was dependent on the East for cheap raw materials, market demand, and labor. Since archaic and ancient times, the West has consistently defined itself as a civilization moving along the "right path" with a progressive consciousness, while advancing the claim that the East, by contrast, was static, resistant to change, and therefore detached from development. This perception becomes particularly visible from the Renaissance onwards. However, although the West's assertion of superiority over the East did not acquire a conscious and systematic form as it did in the modern era, it was nonetheless omnipresent throughout history. In order to establish and legitimize its sense of superiority—both internally and in the eyes of other societies—the West engaged in a search for legitimacy. Much like a king grounding his right to rule in his nobility and lineage, the West shaped its claim to superiority by seeking to anchor it in the depths of history. Within this framework, the West undertook efforts to rewrite history in support of its own ideological aims, a process conceptually described as "theft of history". In its simplest sense, "theft of history" refers to the reinterpretation of history through the Western perspective and the imposition of that interpretation upon the rest of the world. Such an enterprise sought to categorize and label world history through Western concepts, thereby presenting the Western perspective as a universal reality. In this way, the past and historical processes were reframed in accordance with Western interests and legitimized on a global scale (Goody, 2006, p. 1). Admittedly, there are various means of enforcing such an imposition; yet, since the subject in question is history itself, historiography has constituted the main road toward this objective. The West has consistently sought to present itself as distinct from and superior to the East; for this reason, it has highlighted the differences between them to its own advantage, glorified itself, and developed a discourse that reiterated Western superiority over the East throughout history. The West's distorted and incomplete knowledge of the East is deliberate, and its purpose is to reinforce Western dominance over the East on both historical and scientific grounds (Çırakman, 2002, p. 190).

The cornerstone of these distorted and incomplete perceptions lies in the notion that the West is civilized while the East is barbaric. The Western practice of designating the East as "barbarian" has served as a foundational pillar in the construction of civilization and identity. Although Europeans traced their origins back to Greek, Roman, and later Christian culture, they essentially perceived the world through a binary opposition between the civilized West and the barbaric East. Throughout history, the figure of the barbarian—defined as an Eastern "other" standing in opposition to the Greeks, the Romans, and the Christians—was continually reproduced. This process of othering took shape as a conscious policy of the West and was underpinned by various motives. One of the most concrete examples of this policy is the imprinting of the "fear of Turks" onto the Western mind through religious rituals. The ringing of church bells by the order of the Archbishop of Prague to remind of the Turkish threat and the celebration of "masses against Turks" (missa contra turcas) ensured that "the threat was kept permanently alive in people's consciousness" (Karlsson, 2006, p. 62).

First and foremost, the perception of a common threat accelerates processes of identity formation. Societies define themselves in the mirror of the "other" and construct their identities through difference. Identity construction relies on distinctions and oppositions. In this context, the West, by employing Hegel's method of "negation", defined itself through what it was not; within the framework of the master–slave dialectic, it consciously fashioned the "other" in line with its aims and intentions, and then defined itself by looking into this mirror (Bumin, 2005, p. 44; Aksu, 2006, pp. 69-71). Accordingly, while negative attributes such as barbarism, backwardness, stagnation, and despotism were ascribed to the East, the West was simultaneously defined as civilized, progressive, and dynamic-the very antithesis

of these traits. The mechanism of othering operates by projecting onto the "other" the exact opposite of the subject's own attributes; in doing so, the other is positioned simultaneously as a standard of comparison and as a figure of radical alterity. Within this constructed tribunal—where the West assumes the dual role of judge and prosecutor—the other is declared inherently guilty for lacking sociological privileges associated with the subject, such as "civil society" or "individuality". At the same time, this radical difference marks the other as a potential threat to the subject's stability. As Edward Said's critique of Orientalism demonstrates, this discourse erects an epistemological and ontological divide between East and West. Such a divide employs a temporal strategy that confines the East to an "primitive" or "backward" position, while legitimizing the Western subject as the natural culmination of historical evolution and as a universal norm (Yeğenoğlu, 2003, p. 15). In Hegelian discourse, the subject establishes itself only through a mediation with the other. The subject represents itself to itself by employing the other as its point of reference; by casting the other as its categorical opposite, as its radical negation and denial, it is able to constitute itself as an abstract and universal subject (the "I" or ego). Through this *Aufhebung* operation, the other is stripped of its particularity, its difference, and its incommensurability and is ultimately reduced to the subject's subordinate counterpart (Hegel, 1807/2010, p. 22, 94, 97).

This specific form of exclusion, which targets those "presumed to be alien," is defined by philosophers Ronald R. Sundstrom and David Haekwon Kim (2014, p. 24) as "civic ostracism". They argue that xenophobia's primary harm is the denial of inclusion in the "civic mainstream," which in turn creates a "perpetual foreigner syndrome". This categorization allows the dominant group to define "true" and "good" citizens against the "abstract" nation that has been "seized" by outsiders (Sundstrom & Kim, 2014, p. 27-28). This strategy laid the groundwork for the West's self-positioning as a superior and progressive civilization. The attribution of negative qualities to the East facilitated the glorification of the West through positive attributes and its presentation as a universal norm. In this way, the "barbarism" of the East became an instrument for legitimizing the "civilization" of the West. The fundamental basis of this claim to legitimacy is the relationship between knowledge and power. For example, elders are recognized as authorities because they are presumed to possess knowledge derived from age and experience; their authority and dominance rest on knowledge, which grants them a privileged status within society. Similarly, the East-West dichotomy and the Western perception of self-privilege are rooted in the Westernization of knowledge production and in the knowledge-power nexus (Tuna, 2015, p. 171). Another factor behind the West's self-perception as civilized and advanced is the belief in a "superior Aryan race". As a corollary of the notion of the "civilized human", this "superior race" positioned itself as the "master", labeling the East—whether the Turk, the Muslim, the Black person, or others—as the "other", defined through attributes diametrically opposed to its own. This brings us to the question of epistemic validation. The answer lies in history, where humanity has always sought the solutions to its deepest questions. Inevitably, the master's attitude toward the other—whether consciously or unconsciously—has been reflected in historiography. This reflection appears primarily in two ways: first, in the act of naming and defining historical figures and nations; second, in the subjective interpretations and labels applied to historical events. In the subsequent sections of this study, these phenomena will be examined through concrete examples from historiography. Although such practices intensified particularly in the modern era with the rise of nation-states and national identities, societies throughout history have never hesitated to employ history and historiography as weapons in neutralizing one another (Bıçak, 2015, p. 14). The West, too, made use of historiography in order to demonstrate its superiority and even to ensure that the East itself would acknowledge this claim. In fact, "history" has long been used as a tool "*to protect and glorify the reputation of kings or governments and to legitimize the social order in which they live,*" especially before it became a scientific discipline (Carr & Fontana, 1992, p. 24). Yet, in doing so, the West disregarded the most fundamental principle of

historical scholarship: past events must be assessed in relation to space and time—that is, within the specific conditions of their era and geography. Instead, the West evaluated the entirety of history through concepts of its own making and in accordance with developments that took place on the European continent.

Many scholars, writers, and thinkers argue that Europe's sense of superiority and its hegemonic posture began in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—under the influence of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the printing press—and reached its peak during the Enlightenment. However, this attitude of the West is in fact a legacy inherited from Ancient Greece and Rome, upon which it sought to ground and legitimize its own roots. For instance, even Aristotle regarded Eastern peoples as more suited to slavery, and as Plutarch reports, we know that Alexander the Great received the following counsel from his teacher Aristotle[1]: "*Treat the Greeks as friends, but look upon the barbarians as though they were plants or animals.*" (Fontana, 2003, p. 9). For these admonitions are consistent with Aristotle's notion of the "natural slave" as developed in the Politics. He states: "*Since barbarians are naturally more servile than Greeks, and Asiatics more than Europeans, they submit to the rule of a master without objection.*" (Aristotle, 2024, p. 100). According to him, certain peoples, being deficient in reason and virtue, are by nature suited to enslavement. Indeed, he even argues that such a condition is both more beneficial and more just for the slaves themselves (Aristotle, 2024, p. 21). This conception of "natural slavery" has often been interpreted in modern scholarship as part of a broader ideological framework that sought to legitimize domination and hierarchy. By grounding enslavement in alleged deficiencies of rationality and virtue, Aristotle provided a philosophical rationale for practices of subjugation that extended beyond the household into the political and cultural domains. In this respect, his theory exemplifies what later critics describe as an "epistemic justification of domination", whereby inequality between Greeks and barbarians—or between masters and slaves—was naturalized and thereby rendered morally defensible. Some Greek poets also claimed that barbarians and slaves were the same by nature. Thus, in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* (*Iphigeneia en Aulidi*), during a dialogue between Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia[2] and Achilles, she declares: "*It is not right for barbarians to rule over Hellenes; rather, Hellenes should rule over barbarians, and free men over slaves*" (Euripides, 2017, p. 56 [1400]). To this, the chorus responds: "*Your thoughts are most noble, my child*" [1400], while Achilles affirms: "*What you have said for our fatherland is most true…*" [1405], and further praises her by remarking: "*Your conduct is worthy of the noble*" [1410].

Through such examples, the West has consistently written a history that separates the East from itself. This narrative extends from Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, and Medieval Europe to the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and into the modern and postmodern eras (Türkbağ, 2002, p. 210). In other words, the struggle—framed by Westerners as that between a despotic East and a free West—is not new; its roots go back approximately two or three millennia. Our aim here is not to prove that the West, in antiquity or prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, consciously adopted an orientalist perspective or sought to establish hegemony. Nevertheless, as Sabri Ülgener's example of "crisis"[3] illustrates, the absence of terms such as "othering", "orientalism", or "hegemony" in earlier periods does not mean that these phenomena did not exist. For instance, the concept of "genocide" is

[1] Although Alexander later began to grow suspicious of and distant from him, he nonetheless declared of Aristotle, who had given him such counsel: "*To my father I owe my life, but to Aristotle I owe the knowledge of how to live a good and noble life*" (Plutarch, 1967, pp. 243-245; Plutarkhos, 2019, p. 10).

[2] She is the daughter of Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, who played an important role in the Trojan War. Before the war began, the Greek fleet was unable to set sail from Aulis due to the absence of wind. According to prophecy, in order for the wind to blow, Agamemnon had to sacrifice his daughter to the goddess Artemis (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020).

[3] Economist and sociologist Sabri Ülgener argues that, contrary to the common assumption, economic crises did not begin with capitalism. He emphasizes that the absence of the term *crisis* before the nineteenth century has often led to the mistaken impression that such phenomena did not exist earlier, whereas in fact they were explained through different conceptual frameworks (Ülgener, 1951; Ülgener, 1984, p. 45).

only fifty or sixty years old, yet this does not mean that genocides were not committed before the Second World War. Although the concepts of "othering", "orientalism", and "hegemony" were not used in their modern sense, there nevertheless existed in the West what Foucault would call a discourse—that is, a tradition—that persisted for centuries, passed down from generation to generation, from state to state. Ultimately, this discourse served to expand and consolidate Western hegemony, and it continues to do so today. Our concern here is history, and our purpose is to trace the historical roots of this discourse. Even if in earlier times it would be anachronistic to speak explicitly of hegemony or orientalism, the attitude adopted by Europeans—viewing the East and its peoples as inferior and uncivilized, at times to be feared and at other times to be despised, and thereby excluded—was evident in different forms across epochs, sometimes expressed by the Greeks, at other times by the Romans. During the Early Middle Ages, Europeans were not yet in a position to regard themselves as superior to the East, but they nonetheless did not refrain from disparaging and excluding the "Oriental". In the later Middle Ages, with the advance of the Muslim Turks, the West assumed a fully oppositional stance against the East. Within this discursive framework, Islam was first perceived as a threat and later as a problem. According to the *Three Worlds System*, which itself is a product of this discourse, when did the "First World" become first, and who designated it as such? (Ahmad, 1995, pp. 123-124). On this issue, there are those who believe and argue that they were created superior by nature (through the idea of the Aryan or white race). In addition, those who interpret the development of civilizations, cultures—in short, humanity—through the lens of evolutionary theory contend that the Western human being in Europe advanced further than others in the evolutionary process. Whether grounded in the relationship between knowledge and power or in the notion of superior creation, there exists in the West an ingrained consciousness of mastery, which at times has manifested itself in the form of white racial supremacy and dominance. In this sense, the West, as Benedict Anderson puts it, has created an *imagined community*. For imagined communities—that is, collective formations that do not necessarily carry national content—construct a history that meets their political, social, and cultural needs (Hobsbawm, 2009b, p. 339; Anderson, 2006, p. 6). This situation also coincides with the phenomenon Eric Hobsbawm termed "the invention of tradition"; this practice involves "*ritualized constructions aimed at strengthening the cohesion of a specific group or community around a real or mythical past [and] legitimizing certain institutions*" (Traverso, 2019, p. 11). This phenomenon in fact represents a more expansive dimension of the process of nation-building. In this regard, the history fabricated by the West in pursuit of its own interests could not be more concisely expressed than in Hayden White's formulation: "*historical narratives are verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and whose forms have more in common with their counterparts in literature than with those in the sciences.*" (Iggers, 2012, pp. 10, 121-122). The history constructed to consolidate Western hegemony is, at its core, built upon the skeletal framework of the "other" and the "barbarian".

Othering as a Functional Mechanism in the Formation of Collective Identity

In the construction of a collective identity, the presence of a common enemy—an "other"—proves highly useful. Leaders who guide communities instill fear of this "other," thereby compelling their people to cling unquestioningly to their state, nation, and civilization. In doing so, they seek to legitimize the cruelty, plunder, and violence inflicted not only upon their own people but also upon other nations. The most effective way of instilling fear of an enemy has been to portray it as barbaric and as a destroyer of civilization. In selecting or constructing such an "other", the West has, in almost every period of history, turned to the East and its peoples. It is precisely because of this historical foundation that the chasm between East and West remains so vast today. The West has consistently depicted the East—possessing a distinct history, culture, and way of life—as barbaric; and, much like stories spread orally among the people, even those who have authored this myth have eventually come to believe it themselves.

In fact, othering is practiced almost universally: nearly everyone does it on a personal level, and all societies engage in it politically and culturally. The earliest use of the word "barbarian" by the Greeks, for instance, referred to those who spoke languages unintelligible to them, producing strange sounds—that is, speaking in a "bar-bar" manner. Following a similar logic, Turks referred to foreigners who did not speak their language as "Tat", Arabs as "Ajam", and Russians as "Чужой" (Chuzhoy). In this sense, the term "barbarian" originally emerged as a marker of linguistic and cultural difference, but over time it acquired connotations of savagery and lack of civilization. At the same time, our own practice of referring to a vast region—comprising numerous countries, languages, and in fact distinct cultures—with a single word, "the West", also represents a form of othering. Acknowledging this, the purpose of the present study and, ultimately, our critique will not be directed at Western othering per se, but rather at the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of this othering as reflected in historiography.

The Hellenistic Greek writer Pausanias recounts that the Magi priests in Media[4], within their fire temples, read out certain unintelligible passages from a book written in a barbaric language—believed to have been Zoroaster's Gathas. This stands as one of the earliest examples of othering (Bilgin, 2003; Kontny, 2002, p. 126). As we have already noted, the construction of an "other" identity—used to accelerate processes of collective identity formation and to define oneself in the mirror of the "other"—has a history stretching far back into antiquity. The fact that the Greeks discovered their own identity in the face of the Persian threat is precisely for this reason.

Josep Fontana (2003, p. 3) states that "*the Greeks invented the concept of the 'barbarian' as a mirror in which they could look at themselves in order to distinguish themselves from others.*" Herodotus, in turn, interpreted the Greco-Persian Wars not merely as a conflict between two nations or two states, but as a confrontation between Greek freedom and Asia's despotism—unparalleled in its injustice and bloodthirstiness. On the Asiatic coast, the Persian military leader Hydarnes invited the Greeks to his table and asked them: "*Why do you hesitate to accept the friendship of the Great King? You see how the King honors distinguished men; look at me and my wealth. If you also submit to him (for he esteems you as well), the Great King will grant you lands in Greece, and you shall be masters there.*" To this speech, the Greeks replied: "*Hydarnes, the counsel you give us is flawed in one respect: you, who advise us, know only one of the two conditions but are ignorant of the other. You know what slavery is, but you have never experienced freedom, whether it is sweet or bitter; therefore, you cannot know it. If you were ever to taste it, you would advise us not to defend it with spears but with axes.*" (Herodotus, 1973, p. 424 [Histories 7-135]). In another passage, the Greeks declared: "*The resources of the Medes are far greater than ours—we know this as well. Yet the love of freedom is so deeply ingrained in us that we are determined to defend it as best we can. Do not expect us to make terms with the barbarian; we will not accept such a thing.*" The Athenians' reply was: "*Never, so long as the sun follows its present course, never will we make an agreement with Xerxes.*" (Herodotus, 1973, p. 508 [Histories 7-143]). Thus, it becomes clear that the identities of the Greeks and the Persians were constructed upon differences and oppositions.

Until the eighteenth century, the West was preoccupied with constructing an "other" distinct from itself and shaping both itself in relation to this "other" and the "other" in relation to itself. From the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onward, however, under the influence and through the vehicle of Orientalism, the West emphasized its own superiority and adopted as its mission the task of civilizing the barbaric and uncivilized "other". Yet there are serious doubts about the sincerity of this so-called civilizing mission. For the West laid bare the differences of the East as deficiencies, thereby persuading itself—and seeking to persuade others—that the spread of its own superiority and civilization to other regions was both necessary and legitimate (Boztemur, 2002, pp. 139-140). Mustafa Soykut (2002, p.

[4] The lands of the Median Empire within the Iranian region.

42) succinctly summarizes the historical succession of the "other" through Western gaze as follows: "*The role once assumed by the Persians, regarded as barbarians and as the 'other' during the time of the ancient Hellenes, was later taken on by the Huns attacking the Roman Empire, the Mongols devastating northeastern Europe in the thirteenth century, the Arab presence in southern Europe, and finally the Ottomans conquering the territories of Catholic Europe.*" For every hegemonic power seeks for itself an enemy, or at least a rival. At times this enemy has been a state, at other times a religion, sometimes a political figure, and, more frequently in the modern era, a terrorist organization.

The "Barbarian" as the Most Functional Other

Today, the term "barbarian" is generally applied to tribes or nations considered not yet to have attained "civilization". Its etymology, however, lies in the Ancient Greek bárbaros (βάρβαρος), meaning one who is speechless or speaks an unintelligible tongue. The word passed into Latin as barbarous and later into French as barbare, carrying the connotations of foreigner and savage. It first appears in Homer in the phrase "barbarophónon (βαρβαροφώνων)," referring to the "*the Carians who speak bar-bar*". In English translation this has been rendered as "*the Carians, uncouth of speech*" (Homer, 1924, p. 115 [Book II, 854–877]), while in Turkish translation it appears as "*rude-speaking Carians*"[5] (Homeros, 2014, p. 51 [Book II, 867]). The expression "*Carians speaking barbarously*", however, carries a different meaning today, for over time the term evolved into "everyone who is not Greek" and ultimately came to encompass the senses of foreigner and savage. In short, according to the human norms established by the Greeks—the "Westerners" of their time—anyone who did not speak Greek was deemed speechless and barbarian (Kontny, 2002, p. 126). Thus, language became the measuring criterion for discriminating "barbarians" from "civilized citizens of the polis" (Kirilen, 2018, p. 21). However, the filling of this concept with entirely negative judgments rests on a specific historical rupture. Makari (2021) states that while the term barbaroi initially referred merely to an inscrutable language, it changed after the Persian invasion and the Battle of Marathon; thereafter, barbarians became identified specifically with the Persians, coded as "inferior, foreign enemies" (Makari, 2021, p. 9). The Greeks' first use of the term "barbarian" referred to those who spoke in an unintelligible manner, producing strange sounds—that is, "speaking bar-bar"—and thus served to denote linguistic and cultural difference. Over time, however, the term came to acquire the connotations of lack of civilization and savagery.

The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus Augustus was among the clearest voices on the subject of barbarism, setting the standard with his assertion: "*Whoever is not a Hellene is a barbarian*" (Lechner, 1954, pp. 2-4; Tülüce, 2015, p. 37). Although the meaning attached to the term "barbarian" has varied across different periods, one element has remained constant: anyone who is not Western, not European, or who refuses to accept Western civilization and its ideas is considered a barbarian. The French thinker Montaigne approached the issue as follows: in order to justify the conquest of other lands, the denigration of different peoples, and their subjugation under the label of "barbarism," "*we call barbarism whatever is not in our own practice*" (Montaigne, 2016, pp. 148-152, 227; Fontana, 2003, p. 113). For instance, the theologian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who perceived such differences (customs) as barbarism and advocated the forced subjugation of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, declared that "*all of them have barbarous customs, most are by nature devoid of knowledge and understanding, and they are afflicted with many barbarous vices.*" In his view, these characteristics constituted legitimate grounds for subjecting them to obedience like animals, and, if necessary, for killing them (Fontana, 2003, p. 107). Thus, at times—when the East held superiority, such as when the Huns entered Europe, when Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula into the Middle East and Anatolia, or when the Turks from Turkistan conquered Anatolia and advanced deep into Europe—

[5] "*Kaba konuşan Karialılar*" in Turkish.

the West feared Eastern ascendancy and perceived it as an enemy. Yet once the West had secured its own superiority, it felt compelled to protect its "civilization" from the allegedly uncivilized East, distancing the East from itself both materially and spiritually (Kontny, 2002, p. 123).

In Roman historiography, although prejudice and othering were directed against all barbarians under the impulse to protect civilization, the Huns occupied a distinct place. For instance, while Ammianus expressed hatred toward all barbarians, the Huns were, in his words, the worst among those despised (Üstün, 2013, p. 46). The people briefly mentioned in ancient records under the name "Huns" are described as a savage race without equal, living beyond the Sea of Azov on the edge of the Frozen Ocean. They were regarded as the true cause of all the destruction and manifold calamities stirred up by the wrath of Mars (Ammianus, 1902, p. 577 [Book 31]). The alleged savagery and ugliness of the Huns are described as follows: "*At birth, deep scars are cut into the cheeks of infants with iron, so that when their beards would normally grow, they instead wither away and fall out due to the wrinkled scars; thus they grow up beardless and, consequently, far from handsome, resembling eunuchs. Yet all of them possess sturdy and powerful limbs and thick necks. Their stature is tall, but their legs are short, so that one might imagine them as two-legged beasts or as massive figures roughly carved with an axe on the ends of bridges.*" (Ammianus, 1902, pp. 577-578). "*Although coarse and uncouth, they do in fact possess the human form; yet they are so hardy that they have no need of fire or of savory food. They subsist on the roots of grasses found in the fields or on the half-raw flesh of any animal. They warm the meat quickly by placing it between their own thighs and the backs of their horses*[6]." (Ammianus, 1902, p. 578). "*They may be deemed the most terrifying of all warriors.*" (Ammianus, 1902, p. 579). "*Like wild beasts, they have no knowledge whatsoever of the distinction between right and wrong.*" (Ammianus, 1902, p. 580). In speaking of the Huns, Ammianus also mentions the Alans: "*In their country there are no temples or shrines, nor even huts roofed with reeds. Their sole conception of religion is to drive a naked sword into the ground with barbarous rites, and then to worship it with great reverence as the god of the regions through which they wander, like Mars himself.*" (Ammianus, 1902, p. 582).

Claudian, known as the last poet of classical Rome, referred to them as "*the most shameful people of the North*", describing them as "*ugly, with repulsive bodies*" (Claudian, 1990, p. 49). Likewise, Jordanes expressed his views of the Huns in hyperbolic terms: "*this savage race, who speak a language scarcely resembling human speech…*" and "*the Huns, more savage than savagery itself.*" (Jordanes, 1915, p. 85). Moreover, the successes of the Huns were attributed not to their strength or tactics, but to their "*inhuman*" appearance. For, "*with their terrifying looks, they struck great fear into opponents who may not, in fact, have been much inferior to them in battle. With their dark complexion, which was itself fearsome, and with what might be called a shapeless mass in place of a head and pinholes instead of eyes, the Huns, by their dreadful faces, filled their enemies with terror and drove them to flight.*" (Jordanes, 1915, p. 86). The Alans were categorized as "*less barbarous in their way of life and habits*", while the Huns were labeled as "primitive barbarians". In another striking observation, it was noted that members of this primitive people, despite all their ugliness, were nonetheless in human form. In short, the Huns were the most marginalized and fearsome of the barbarian world—the barbarians of the barbarians (cited from Latin sources in Üstün, 2013, pp. 46-47). In other words, the Romans, like their predecessors and successors, not only assumed for themselves the authority to decide which groups qualified as barbarians, but also measured the degree of barbarity of these peoples according to their own self-constructed standards, creating categories such as "less barbarous" or "primitive barbarian".

In Roman works of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the distinction between Roman and non-

[6] One of the delicacies that today features prominently even in the most modern states' restaurants, *pastırma (bacon)*, was already consumed by the Hun Turks nearly two millennia ago. Yet Ammianus, who considered himself a representative of the "civilized" world but was unaware of this culinary tradition, claimed that the Turks merely warmed their meat slightly and ate it half raw.

Roman was expressed as "Romei ke Barbari" (Romans and Barbarians). Barbarians were those who were not Greek, who could not speak Greek properly, and who were unfamiliar with Hellenic culture—that is, uncultured and uncivilized individuals. An examination of the writings of Roman historians of this period (such as Choniates, Akropolites, Pachymeres, Gregoras, and Kantakouzenos) shows that the label "barbarian" was applied to a wide range of peoples, from Germans to Catalans and from Serbs to Syriacs, at different times and in various works. Yet regardless of time, place, or author, there was consensus on one point: the Turks were barbarians. The term barbarian (denoting inhuman, monstrous, and violent behavior) was used both as a noun and as an adjective in reference to the Seljuk Turks (Tülüce, 2015, pp. 33-36). Moreover, those not born Roman but who entered the service of the Roman state—and their children—were considered Romans, though it was emphasized that they were not Greeks. For example, a soldier with a Roman mother and a Turkish father, even if Christian, was described as being "of Turkish origin" or "of barbarian origin". Such individuals were called Miksobarbari, meaning "Mixobarbaroi"[7] (Tülüce, 2015, pp. 29-35, 42). As can be seen, the historical continuity of the barbarian stereotype is clearly evident in the Western perception of the Turks throughout different periods of history. Characteristics used for barbarians—such as "*speaking an incomprehensible language, coming from lands far from civilization, being ignorant and uncultured, shouting war cries, and being cruel and destructive*"—were also claimed to be found in the Turks (Yardım, 2021, p. 418).

In response to the claim that from the eighteenth century onward—spurred by the Renaissance and shaped by the Enlightenment—the contrast between West and East came to be represented as rational versus emotional, free versus enslaved, progressive versus backward. Such a consolidated and self-assured assertion of superiority had not appeared in earlier centuries (Çırakman, 2002, p. 203), we can in fact observe this attitude in many earlier periods. The West consistently articulated its sense of superiority in texts, portraying the East as backward and insignificant. Even when Eastern superiority began to emerge, Western writers again interpreted it through a Eurocentric lens, viewing it as divine retribution: that God was testing the West by granting superiority to the East as a form of punishment. This specific interpretation was prevalent after the fall of Constantinople. G. Ricci (2005, p. 31) notes that in the European imagination, the "red horse, the angel of destruction" from the Book of Revelation was increasingly depicted in Turkish dress, and the Turk was widely interpreted as "*the one taking God's vengeance on sinful Christians*". In sum, the subject has always been the West. Even when the East appeared "superior", this was never attributed to its own capacity but was instead conceived as the result of God using Eastern peoples merely as instruments.

According to Christian authors who shared this mindset, the Christian world had strayed from its former piety, burdened with countless sins and grave transgressions; what God had forbidden had become part of the everyday lives of Christians. For this reason, God was temporarily punishing them. These invasions, then, were construed as part of the chastisement devised to bring heretical and wayward Christians back to the right path. One commentary explains these events as follows: "*God did not permit the Arabs to invade because He loved them. Rather, such a situation arose on account of the sins and evils committed by Christians.*" Maximus, for his part, remarked of the Islamic conquests: "*What could be more dreadful than the evil that now encircles the civilized world? Behold, a barbarian nation of the desert invades another land as if it were their own. Witness our civilization laid to ruin by wild and savage beasts…*" (Duygu, 2014, pp. 40-41). Another explanation offered for the success of the barbarian Arabs was this: "*The Arabs possessed a special command from God regarding our monastic state. Otherwise, how could naked and wretched men, without shield or armor, achieve victory apart from the help of God?*" (cited from John bar Penkaye in Duygu, 2014, p. 54).

[7] They were referred to as "Mixed Barbarians" or "Half-Barbarians". Those who were not subjects of the Roman realm, on the other hand, were called "Foreign Barbarians".

From these commentaries it is clear that, following the victories of the Islamic armies over Byzantium in Syria and Persia, there arose a perceived need to explain these developments. For under normal circumstances—as the texts themselves suggest—it was inconceivable that the barbarian Arabs could triumph over the civilized Romans. Thus it was claimed that God had aided the Arabs, and only in this way could barbarians defeat the civilized. That the Arabs/Islamic armies fought in the name of God, and that God assisted them, is an idea the Muslims themselves could accept—even take pride in. Yet the point to be emphasized here is the perspective of the Westerners/Europeans. The Romans, as always, positioned themselves as the subject, implying that God employed the barbarians to correct the civilized, and that for this reason the Arabs were under divine protection. This discourse was later echoed even by the German reformist theologian Martin Luther, who likened the Ottoman sultan to the Pope and interpreted the Turkish leader as a scourge created by God to punish the Pope, regarding him as a divine trial (Kadı, 2002, p. 86). Similarly, the sixteenth-century traveler Geuffroy considered the Turks to be "*sluggish, ugly, and ignorant, and viewed their success as a punishment inflicted by God upon Christians*" (cited from Antoine Geuffroy in Çırakman, 2002, p. 197). In fact, even the natural earthquakes in the land of the Greeks were attributed to the Turks, for the hoofbeats of their "godless" horses were said to resound through Byzantine palaces. Moreover, after conquering Anatolia, the Turkish sultans would come to Constantinople, visit the sacred sites, and thereby provoke God's wrath (Tülüce, 2015, p. 30).

Between 1458 and 1464, Enea Silvio Piccolomini—better known as Pope Pius II[8] and one of the prominent humanists of the period—contributed significantly through his works and ideas to the prejudices against the Ottomans (whom Europeans commonly referred to as "the Turks") (Soykut, 2002, pp. 72-73). In his treatise La Discritione de l'Asia et Europa di Papa Pio II, written between 1453 and 1461—that is, between the Turkish conquests of Constantinople and Trebizond—he declared: "*Many writers of our time, not only orators or poets but even historians, are ensnared in the error of referring to the Turks as 'Trojans'. I believe they are influenced by the fact that the Turks occupy Troy, which was inhabited by the Trojans. But the Trojans originated in Crete and Italy. The Turkish race is Scythian and uncivilized.*" (Piccolomini [Pope Pius II], 2013, p. 72). "*They were a ferocious and shameless race, given to fornication with whores and every kind of illicit intercourse. They ate what other people abominate—the flesh of beasts of burden, wolves, and vultures—and even partook of human fetuses*" (Piccolomini [Pope Pius II], 2013, p. 73). This historical continuity was also supported by myths based on sacred texts. Thus grounding their barbarism on a theological foundation. Karlsson (2006, p. 63-64) points out that between the 15th and 17th centuries, twice as many books were published about the Turkish threat as about the discovery of America. This demonstrates how the othering of the Turk was not an isolated act but part of a broader political mechanism that intensified with the rise of modern nationalism. As G. Makari (2021, p. 43) explains, 19th-century nationalism required the construction of national enemies to unify the populace. This process led to the creation of numerous national phobias, as journalists and scholars began to routinely write of Francophobia, Germanophobia, Russophobia, and, pointedly, Turkophobia. This "patriotic zealotry," was so extreme that it was compared to a medical "phobia", framing the hatred of the other as an irrational political animus.

Yet here an ironic situation arises: in contemporary debates concerning the origins of the Scythians, some scholars, by referring to their way of life and cultural traits, argue that the Scythians

[8] This pope is also renowned for writing a letter (*Epistola ad Mahometem / Letter to Mehmed*) to Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, who had taken Constantinople from the Christians, inviting him to embrace Christianity. However, it remains a matter of debate whether this historical letter was ever sent by the Pope or whether it reached Mehmed. Against claims that the letter was never dispatched, Halil İnalcık, analyzing the developments of those years, asserts that the Pope did indeed send the letter of 1463—containing the statement, *"I shall recognize you as the Emperor of Eastern Rome, but only if you become a Christian"*—and that it was delivered to Mehmed through secret channels (İnalcık, 2015, p. 142).

were (Proto-)Turks or that Turks and Scythians descended from a common ancestor.[9] By contrast, in the fifteenth century, the "West", in order to denigrate the Turks, linked their lineage to the Scythians[10]; but from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries onward, for reasons yet to be fully explained, the same West began to claim that the Scythians were not Turkic but rather an Iranian people or the ancestors of the indigenous Ossetes of the Caucasus. Those curious about the reasons for this shift in interpretation need only examine the Scythian artifacts[11] in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, with an eye to their material and cultural implications. In the fifteenth century, by calling the Turks "Scythians", Pope Pius II intended almost as an insult to suggest that they were uncivilized barbarians from Asia. Of course, he could not have known that the allegedly uncivilized Scythians, a millennium before he wrote those lines, had already accomplished significant political and cultural achievements and possessed a notable civilization of their own. Yet as the civilization of the "uncivilized" Scythians has been unearthed by historians and archaeologists, the West (including the Russians) seems to have decided that such a culture was too advanced to be left to the Turks, and therefore initiated the debates on Scythian origins. In other words, as the West has sought to reconstruct history, it has consistently tried to exclude from its own historical narrative whatever might obstruct, delay, or "taint" its civilizational progress, while conversely incorporating into its history whatever would enhance and advance it. This mentality and condition are powerfully depicted in George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984. The work illustrates how a totalitarian regime can shape reality by controlling not only the thoughts of individuals but even the past itself. Orwell compellingly demonstrates how oppressive powers, through surveillance, censorship, and propaganda, can eradicate freedom and subject society to a manufactured truth: "*Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.*" (Orwell, 2021, p. 36), "*All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary.*" (Orwell, 2021, p. 43) and "*The alteration of the past is necessary... He must be cut off from the past... But the more important reason for the readjustment of the past is the need to safeguard the infallibility of the Party. It is not merely that speeches, statistics, and records of every kind must be constantly brought up to date in order to show that the predictions of the Party were in all cases right. It is also that no change in doctrine or in political alignment can ever be admitted. For to change one's mind, or even one's policy, is a confession of weakness. If, for example, Eurasia or Eastasia (whichever it may be) is the enemy today, then that country must always have been the enemy. And if the facts say otherwise then the facts must be altered. Thus history is continuously rewritten. This day-to-day falsification of the past, carried out by the Ministry of Truth, is as necessary to the stability of the regime as the work of repression and espionage carried out by the Ministry of Love. The mutability of the past is the central tenet of Ingsoc. Past events, it is argued, have no objective existence, but survive only in written records and in human memories. The past is whatever the records and the memories agree upon. And since the Party is in full control of all records and in equally full control of the minds of its members, it follows that the past is whatever the Party chooses to make it.*" (Orwell, 2021, pp. 221-222).

In sum, the concept of the "barbarian" became a crucial instrument in identity construction—first for the Greeks, then for the Romans, and subsequently for Europeans. It was employed to cultivate the perception that communities defined as the "Other" were culturally and morally inferior. Thus, the

[9] An important work written both to examine this issue—including the cultures and origins of the Saka and Sarmatians and to trace the roots of othering in the case of Iran and Turan—and to offer a profound critique of the efforts to construct an imaginary history is: Karatay, 2003, pp. 140-169.

[10] In that period, the terms "Barbarian" and "Scythian" were used almost synonymously. At this point, references may be made both to the historical knowledge concerning the Scythians and Cimmerians, and—by way of cultural reception—to the figure of "Conan the Barbarian" (-also known as Conan the Cimmerian-is a fictional character created by American author Robert E. Howard in 1932, see: Howard, 1932; Dowd, 2016, pp. 15-34), which reflects the enduring legacy of such associations in modern imagination.

[11] For a detailed study of Scythian and Sarmatian cultures, see: *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes* (2000). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art-Yale University Press.

notion of the barbarian functioned not merely as a marker of difference, but also as a tool of asserting superiority.

The Knowledge-Power Nexus and Hegemony

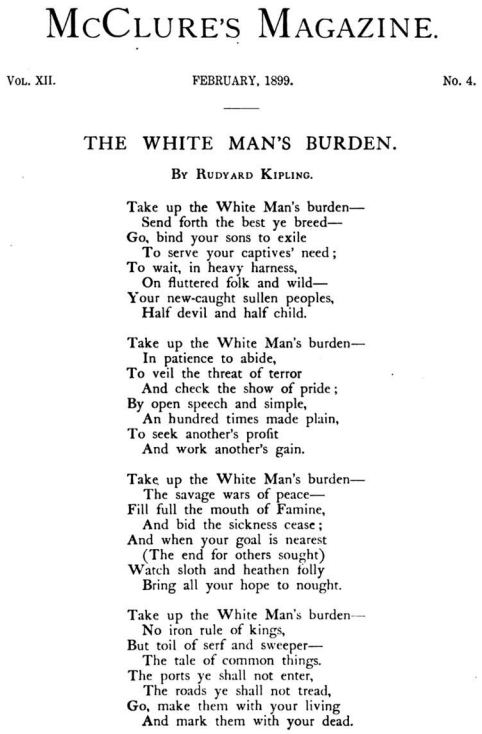
The West's perception of itself as possessing the competence and experience to govern—while simultaneously portraying the East as devoid of such capacity—is directly related to Michel Foucault's discourse on power/knowledge (Foucault, 2012, p. 35). The West's command of administrative knowledge positioned it in a natural state of superiority over the East, which was presumed to lack such knowledge (Turna, 2002, p. 224). From the Western perspective, the primary cause of the East's backwardness lay in this alleged deficiency of knowledge. The reason why the West, for centuries, characterized the East as ignorant, barbaric, and incapable of governance is rather evident: a text does not merely produce knowledge; over time, it generates the very reality of that knowledge. This reality gradually becomes a tradition and, in Foucault's terms, institutionalizes itself as a discourse. Through this discourse, the West compelled the East to internalize its supposed deficiencies, thereby legitimizing its own knowledge and governing capacity. As Edward Said has pointed out in Orientalism, Western representations of the East were not neutral descriptions but rather constructions that produced the "Orient" as an object of knowledge, always defined in relation to the superiority of the West. In this sense, knowledge was not only a tool of description but also an act of domination: to represent the East was already to subordinate it. Thus, epistemic superiority became the fundamental justification for the West's claim to dominance over the East (Bıçak, 2015, p. 184; Said, 1979; Kahraman, 2002, pp. 164-165). As an epistemological framework regarding the East, Orientalism was inextricably bound to the apparatus of political and economic power; thereby, it served a dual function: providing an a priori legitimation for colonial rule and streamlining its eventual administration (Young, 1990, p. 129).

While defending their hegemony over the East, Westerners did not justify it merely on the basis of their own administrative capacity or the alleged barbarity and lack of civilization of Eastern peoples, but also on the argument that the East was incapable of self-government—and that, without Western oversight, Eastern societies would fall into even worse conditions. British statesman A. J. Balfour, whose name is associated with the Balfour Declaration that paved the way for the establishment of Israel, sought to justify the necessity of the British occupation of Egypt[12] in these terms: "*You may look through the whole history of the Orientals in what is called, broadly speaking, the East, and you never find traces of self-government. All their great centuries—and they have been very great—have been passed under despotisms, under absolute government… That is the fact. It is not a question of superiority and inferiority… Is it a good thing for these great nations—I admit their greatness —that this absolute government should be exercised by us? I think it is a good thing. I think that experience shows that they have got under it far better government than in the whole history of the world they ever had before, and which not only is a benefit to them, but is undoubtedly a benefit to the whole of the civilised West....*" (Said, 1979, pp. 32-33). This argument was a cornerstone of British imperial historiography in India. Orientalist historians like James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and Vincent Smith systematically argued that the pre-colonial Baburid Empire was inherently "despotic", culturally "backward", and defined by the "cruelty" of rulers like Aurangzeb. As S. Kalkan (2024) details, this narrative intentionally severed the Baburid decline from British colonial activities, framing British intervention not as conquest but as a "civilizing project" designed to rescue a "decaying civilization". This historical reframing was explicitly linked to the concept of the "White Man's Burden", transforming colonial

[12] For further details, on Britain's interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, and Egypt, see: Uncu, C. (2025). XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Kıbrıs'ın Hindistan Yolu İçin Önemi ve İngiliz Dış Politikasına Etkisi (The Importance of Cyprus for the Indian Route in the Second Half of the 19th Century and Its Effect on British Foreign Policy). *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, *40*(1), pp. 427-467.

exploitation into a perceived humanitarian duty (Kalkan, 2024, p. 120-128). At this point, Said recalls Karl Marx's well-known phrase—"*They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented*"[13]—to explain the very logic through which Western hegemony sought to legitimize its domination over the East (Said, 1979, p. 21).

As summarized by Kontny (2002, pp. 123-131), the West essentially declares: "*This is what I am, that is what you are; you must submit to me. I am the West—reason, science, democracy—whereas you are the East—emotion and instinct, religious fanaticism, and despotism.*" This stance clearly rests upon Gramsci's concept of hegemony.[14] Texts that articulate such views eventually generate a discourse or tradition through which the East comes to accept the West's superiority and right to rule, thereby giving its consent to Western hegemony. As Gramsci stated, "*every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship*" (Fontana, 1993, p. 107). Since the West is considered advanced and civilized, while the East is deemed backward and barbaric, progress and modernization for the latter are seen as possible only by adopting European values. Europeans, in turn, justified the extraction of material wealth, minerals, and works of art from these regions—as well as the reduction of local populations to servitude or, at best, wage labor—as the rightful compensation for bringing these values. To put it more concisely and forcefully: "*The white man's burden is to civilize the world*" (Bıçak, 2015, p. 185).



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THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN.

BY RUDYARD KIPLING.

Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait, in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.

Take up the White Man's burden—
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain,
To seek another's profit
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden—
The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of Famine,
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
(The end for others sought)
Watch sloth and heathen folly
Bring all your hope to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden—
No iron rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper—
The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,
The roads ye shall not tread,
Go, make them with your living
And mark them with your dead.

Figure 1. *The White Man's Burden poem.*

The concept of *The White Man's Burden* originates from the famous poem of the same title by the English writer and poet Rudyard Kipling, composed in the aftermath of the Spanish–American War, following the United States' annexation of the Philippines (Kipling, 1899, pp. 290-291; Epstein, 2022).

[13] In Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the phrase appears in German as *"Sie können sich nicht vertreten, sie müssen vertreten werden."* However, what Marx meant here was by no means confined to Eastern societies (Marx, 1869, p. 89).

[14] "*The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'...*" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57) and "*The 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so called organs of public opinion...*" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 80).

Coincidence or not, in the same year as Rudyard Kipling's poem, an advertisement for Pears' Soap appeared with the slogan that teaching cleanliness to the peoples of the East was likewise part of the White Man's Burden. In this advertisement, the White Man was urged to promote cleanliness among other races. Pears' Soap was portrayed as a powerful instrument of civilization, illuminating the dark corners of the world as progress advanced.

Figure 2. *"The first step toward lightening the White Man's burden is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness."* (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, 1899).

Through this discourse, colonialism and imperialism have been legitimized and presented to the world under the guise of a "civilizing mission" from the past to the present[15]. In fact, the term xenophobia itself initially emerged as a tool of this very imperialist discourse. As Western imperialism spread, "*Xenophobia then functioned as a crude map: the accuser would be from the civilized West, and the xenophobe from the wild and primitive East*." It was used, much like the "colonizing mission" or "racial science", as an Orwellian abstraction that justified colonial domination by framing Eastern rebellion as an irrational fear of strangers rather than a legitimate resistance to invasion (Makari, 2021, p. 231).

This rhetoric exhibits a striking continuity. In the nineteenth century, under the banner of "civilization" and "progress," the West sought to teach cleanliness and order to Eastern peoples, while in reality exploiting their lands and labor. Today, the same approach continues through the rhetoric of democracy. The European Union (EU) and the United States (US), for instance, have intervened in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria—societies labeled "barbaric" or "despotic"—and, more recently, in the Middle East and North Africa during the Arab Spring, claiming to "bring democracy" with the aid of modern military technologies. This rhetoric is a continuation of the West's longstanding attitude toward diverse peoples, from Native Americans to Aboriginal Australians, Africans to Muslims. Operating under the

[15] This rhetorical strategy of justification persists, though it has adapted to contemporary norms. Modern xenophobia is often "sheltered" by "nationalized narratives of racism" (such as the black-white binary) that allow anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim sentiment to be framed as something other than racism. R.R. Sundstrom (2013) terms this "xenophobia's double play": the tactic is to (1) define racism narrowly based on a specific historical template (e.g., anti-black racism), and then (2) justify hostility towards the "foreigner" as a non-racist, rational concern. A clear example is the slogan used by the organization Stop Islamisation of Europe (SIOE): "*Racism is the lowest form of human stupidity, but Islamophobia is the height of common sense*" (Sundstrom, 2013, p. 69-77). This demonstrates how the core logic of the civilizing mission—branding the "other" (in this case, the Muslim) as a "civilizational threat" —is reproduced, while simultaneously co-opting antiracist language to defend itself.

assumption that "*those who know have the right to rule"* and that *"ignorant barbarians must be guided*", the West justified the exploitation of so-called backward societies through its "civilizing" perspective, even in times when the potential equality of all humans was being discussed and slavery was beginning to be rejected. Notably, George W. Bush, the first U.S. president of the twenty-first century, echoed this historical discourse when he described Iraq as one of the "*dark corners of the world*" and asserted that attacks were necessary "*to bring civilization and freedom*" there. In other words, Iraq was in darkness, and thus the United States had to illuminate it with the torch of civilization and freedom—carried, however, by deadly weapons. In this way, modern Western imperialism continues to justify its interventions in the East through the rhetoric of a "civilizing mission" cloaked in democratization (Césaire, 2005, p. 53). Just as Pears' Soap was once depicted as the agent of light, modern military technology is now presented as the torchbearer of civilization.

However, A. Césaire radically exposes the hypocrisy of this "civilizing mission", arguing that colonialism does not civilize, but rather destroys civilization. He defines colonialism as "thingification", Césaire asserts that the colonizer reduces the native to a mere instrument of production. In response to those who speak of "progress", "achievements", "diseases cured" or "improved standards of living": "*I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed... I am talking about millions of people who have been cunningly instilled with fear, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble with fear, to kneel, to despair, and to behave sycophantically.*" (Césaire, 2007, p. 51, 77). Thus, the "civilizing" narrative is revealed as a mechanism for creating subservience and inferiority.

Taking all this into consideration, it can be argued that "progress was invented" or, drawing on Hegel's logic of negation, Fontana's mirror metaphor, and Foucault's discourse on power/knowledge, that the "backwardness of other peoples was invented" (Fontana, 2003, pp. 122-123). In order to define and legitimize its own progress, the West constructed the image of other peoples as characterized by stagnation and backwardness. In doing so, it placed these alleged deficiencies within an ideological framework, thereby both reinforcing its own superiority and presenting that superiority as a universal reality.

Russia as the West's East and the 'Other' Europeans

Peter I (1682-1725) undertook extensive reforms aimed at transforming and advancing Russia in the military, political, and socio-cultural spheres by modeling it on Western Europe. Within the framework of these reforms, he repositioned Russia—historically situated as a transitional zone between East and West—by directing it toward the West and initiating a profound process of modernization within the state structure. By the end of the century, it is evident that Russian society, which during his reign had maintained a distant and often negative attitude toward the Western world, had itself become a colonial power. Pursuing imperial ambitions, Russia occupied foreign territories and sought to transform their indigenous populations under the rhetoric of "civilizing" them (Khodarkovsky, 2021, p. 16). Russia's position vis-à-vis the West is not merely a geographical separation but a conscious construction of identity. Russia's adoption of Orthodoxy functioned as a desire to stand apart from the West and to define itself. This "schism" is less an abstract controversy than an ethnic affirmation; by rejecting Catholicism, Russia may have delayed her evolution, but she thereby gained in substance and unity, constructing her own "otherness" through a profound break with the Western world (Cioran, 1996, p. 25). This dialectical tension between the Peter's drive for Westernization and the deep-seated Orthodox impulse for separation elucidates Russia's liminal status as the 'Other Europe,' where identity is consciously constructed against the very model it seeks to emulate. Consequently, this assertion of 'otherness' provides the ideological bridge between internal reform and external expansion, framing the

colonial subjugation of the Caucasus not merely as conquest, but as a validation of Russia's unique civilizational essence.

Following these two processes, Russia—perceived as the "East of the West" or "the Other Europe"—adopted an approach of "othering" in the territories it conquered or sought to conquer, similar to that of Western European powers. Addressing this issue and examining the Russian construction of the "Other", Erkilet (2015, pp. 15-16) introduces her work as an oral history study on the "Others", namely the Caucasian peoples and the Chechens, who, having been subjected for centuries to the domination of fair-haired Slavs, came to be known as the "dark ones". Like other colonial and "civilized" states, Russia, under the banner of a "civilizing mission", aimed from the sixteenth century onwards to establish authority in the Caucasus, exploit local resources for its own interests, and settle the region with a "civilized" Russian population (Erkilet, 2015, pp. 15-35).

The peoples of the Caucasus, it was argued, had to be expelled from the region "to the very last mountaineer" and replaced with "civilized" Russian peasants. The justification given was that these "semi-wild peoples" were incapable of rationally exploiting the resources of the land. Thus, the Caucasian peoples had already been branded as "savages", and on top of that, from a Western perspective, they were judged to be irrational (Gordin, 2014, pp. 328-329). Gordin (2014, p. 34) further notes that Mikhail Sergeyevich Lunin, one of the Decembrist[16] rebels, referred to the peoples of the Caucasus as "scattered weak flocks" and "miserable natives". Similarly, in Adolf Berjé's work, those groups that Russia was able to subjugate are portrayed in a favorable light, whereas the unconquered mountaineers, in a tone colored by resentment at Russian failure, are described as "*savages, ignoramuses, and the farthest removed from civilization*" (Berjé, 2010; Erkilet, 2015, pp. 37-38). This discourse reflects Russia's attempt to impose both a physical and an ideological subjugation upon the peoples of the Caucasus. This stance represents nothing less than a localized adaptation of the broader Western "civilizing mission" discourse, whereby domination was justified through the dual rhetoric of savagery and irrationality. The work of A. Berjé (2010, pp. 12-13), one of the prominent Caucasus specialists of the nineteenth century, serves both as a guide to understanding the peoples of the Caucasian highlands and as an analytical study of the conditions that necessitated migration. Although it contains factual inaccuracies and biased interpretations, Berjé's research nonetheless provides valuable insights into the overall situation of the Caucasus—then a *terra incognita* for the Russians—as well as on the events and the process of exile that took place in the region. In preparing his work, Berjé followed a more systematic approach than most of his contemporaries, drawing extensively on earlier Russian military reports, travelers' notes, and missionary writings. In this respect, his work constitutes an important source for understanding the Russian discourse on the Caucasus. The text represents not only a hybrid form combining ethnographic description with military intelligence but also a quintessential example of colonial knowledge production. As one of the most institutionalized examples of such knowledge in the process of the Russification of the Caucasus, it also holds significance within the nineteenth-century European context of constructing the "Other" and framing the opposition between "civilization" and "barbarism." Berjé, a Tsarist official, reflects the dominant discourse of his era—dividing the world into "us" (the Russian Empire, bearers of civilization, prosperity, and peace, and thus entitled to conquest) and "them" (the semi-savage mountaineers who resisted civilization and their so-called destiny). Known as the "official historian of the Tsar", Berjé (2010, pp. 164-165) seeks to absolve Russia and Tsar Alexander II by attributing responsibility for the catastrophe to the Caucasian peoples themselves, as well as to the Ottomans and Western powers he accuses of inciting them. Depicting the "mountaineer" peoples as exotic, warlike, backward, yet

[16] Those who, led by certain officers of the Russian army, rose against Tsar Nicholas I in December 1825. Because the revolt broke out in December, the insurgents were called the *Decembrists* (*Dekabristy*). The uprising was suppressed by Nicholas I and his forces, and the surviving rebels were exiled to Siberia.

courageous, Berjé's work legitimizes Russia's "civilizing mission". In this sense, it clearly reflects an orientalist and imperial perspective.

In the Caucasus, the Russians, who had come with the mission of "civilizing", were deeply frustrated by the prolonged resistance of the mountaineer peoples—whose way of life was labeled "primitive"—against Russia's state-of-the-art weaponry equipped with Western technology. This resistance drove them to fury and led to the widespread use of disparaging expressions such as "obstinate", "fanatical", and "bigoted" to describe the peoples of the Caucasus (Temizkan, 2010, p. 83). In other words, the Caucasians, who refused to submit to Russian domination because of their attachment to freedom and land, were criticized as "barbarians". As with other colonial powers, the Russians portrayed not the exploiters and killers, but those defending their lands in the name of freedom, as the true barbarians. The Russians regarded the mountaineers as barbaric, primitive, and semi-savage peoples, and believed that they were generously fulfilling the task of enlightening and civilizing them. They even described this humanitarian mission as "honorable". Yet the Russians themselves acknowledged that the full realization of this honorable duty was impossible. In their view, enlightenment could never take root among the "ignorant" Muslim population, deemed inherently hostile to any form of illumination (AKAK, 1875, Doc. No. 859). In this vein, Freshfield (1869, p. 271) remarked: "*We found, invariably, that in proportion as the natives are brought into contact with their rulers, they improve in manners and civilisation, and that the districts which the Russians have left to take care of themselves are those in which the old customs of petty warfare, robbery, and murder still prevail.*" In sum, the peoples of the Caucasus, who refused to submit to Russian domination because of their attachment to freedom and land, were accused of barbarism precisely on account of these qualities. Like all other colonial societies, the Russians legitimized their own occupations and massacres by branding as "barbarians" those who defended their territories. In this way, they sought to appear not as aggressors and exploiters, but as saviors bringing civilization. This discourse became a frequently employed instrument to delegitimize the just resistance of the Caucasian peoples and to justify Russia's colonial policies.

The Russians, embracing these ideas, characterized the massacres and conquests in the Caucasus as part of their "civilizing mission". Yet the Caucasus was not the only region that Russia sought to illuminate with what it considered the torch of Western civilization. Turkestan, too, was inhabited by the "barbarian" Turkic-Muslim peoples. The region, home to Turkmens, Afghans, and Kashgaris, was described by the Russians as the "semi-barbarian" frontiers of Asia (Марков, 1901, p. 10). During the reign of Catherine II, Turkestan became a priority region for Russia in terms of both strategic and colonial objectives. In the eighteenth century, particularly under her rule, a series of exploratory expeditions were organized at the Empress's direct instruction to reveal the region's geographical, ethnographic, and economic unknowns. Catherine's primary aim was to construct in Turkestan a colonial order similar to that which European powers, led by Britain, had established in India and Africa. For this reason, Turkestan has often been described as "Russia's Africa" (Özkan, 2019, pp. 54-55).

In 1864, Gorchakov declared that the Russian mission was to civilize Asia and that, precisely for this reason, they were praised even by Europeans. According to him, the best means of spreading "civilization" to Asia was through trade. He further insisted that the Russians were not enemies of the states and peoples of Turkestan, nor did they harbor any intentions of conquest; rather, they sought peaceful and commercial relations (Fraser-Tytler, 1950, p. 308).[17] Yet, despite Gorchakov's memorandum of 1864, which emphasized that the sole purpose was to enlighten Asia with Western civilization through commerce, within only two decades Russia had conquered Turkestan and advanced to the Afghan frontier.

[17] See: *Translation of Prince Gorchakov's Memorandum*, St. Petersburg, 21 November 1864.

Russia was not content merely with seizing the Caucasus. While turning toward Turkestan en route to India, it also aimed to leave behind not a threatening Caucasus but one "cleansed" of indigenous mountaineers and Circassians, resettled instead with loyal new inhabitants of the same faith as the Russians, thereby constructing a compliant Caucasus (Akan, 2019, p. 206). The very same process was underway in Turkestan during the 1880s, epitomized by the Göktepe Massacre. Both these actions and Dostoevsky's own remarks correspond precisely to the definition of colonialism: the first stage, the seizure of foreign lands; the second, their "cleansing"[18] of native populations, followed by the settlement of migrants and the cultivation of the territory (Ferro, 2002, p. 19). Whether in the Caucasus or in Turkestan, during the second half of the nineteenth century the regions were "illuminated" and "civilized" under the "sacred light of the Tsar". The only way to achieve this, of course, was through Russification—absorbing these "wild" lands into Russia in every material and spiritual sense (Akan, 2019, p. 42).

Although often accused of being a British agent and at times openly defending British interests (Whitman, 2017, p. 275), even Vámbéry maintained that if Russia's ultimate objective were not an advance toward Afghanistan and India, its conquest and "civilizing" of Turkestan as the representative of a European and Christian civilization could indeed be beneficial (Vámbéry, 2022, pp. 19-20). In fact, Vámbéry's reflections reveal his conviction that "*the Christian civilization—undoubtedly the noblest and most magnificent civilization humanity has ever known—would be of great benefit to Central Asia.*" (Vámbéry, 2022, pp. 501-503). This belief mirrored the discourse of the time: in 1855, for instance, the British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston proudly declared that Britain was carrying civilization and enlightenment to India (Richmond, 2022, p. 279). Moreover, although Vámbéry developed a degree of empathy for the peoples of Turkestan and harbored a clear sympathy for the Ottomans, he nevertheless regarded Tehran as the final frontier of European civilization; beyond it, he described a geography situated outside the bounds of civilization—a world of hardship and peril, defined as barbarism (Vámbéry, 2019, p. 53).

Among the most striking observations on Russia's advance into Turkestan—perceived in direct opposition to British interests—are those framed through the perspective of "Western/Christian Civilization". Following the 1880 massacre at Geok-Tepe, as Russia's expansion and activities in Asia continued, Dostoevsky's diary in 1881 contained the remarkable entry: "*...our civilizing mission in Asia...*" (Достоевский, 1984, pp. 32-40). "*The next point that requires the consideration of thoughtful people, is whether the influence of Russia in Central Asia is beneficial or the reverse; whether, with all her numerous defects, she is not acting as a civilizing agent in vast territories hitherto given up to lawlessness, to robber-bands, and to slavery and the slave-trade in their most cruel forms... There is Russia deploying southward on her march across the continent. Is she not the only power on earth in position to do the work of Christian civilization for the northern half of Asia?*" (Baxter, 1885, p. 20). Similarly, Lessar questioned: "*Could the barbarous condition of these countries, inhabited by the most restless tribes in the world, be tolerated merely for the sake of preventing a possible danger to the British Empire?*" (Lessar, 1885, p. 74).

As can be observed, the expansionist ambitions of Western imperialism were legitimized not only on economic grounds but also through an ideological framework. Colonial activities carried out under

[18] The operations carried out by the Russians in the region between 1859 and 1864 are referred to as a kind of "cleansing" (*ochishchenie*). In other words, the region was being purged of its non-Russian Turkic, Circassian, and Muslim population. The term *ochishchenie* functioned not only as a military designation for these campaigns but also as an ideological construct, framing mass expulsions and demographic engineering as a form of "purification" deemed necessary for the consolidation of Russian authority. Moreover, this historical pattern of demographic engineering is further analyzed by Özcan, who argues that the 1944 deportation of Crimean Tatars was not merely an exile, but a systematic genocide aimed at the total destruction of a nation. His works emphasize that comprehending this tragic history and the subsequent struggle for survival is essential for evaluating the dynamics behind the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea (Özcan, 2018; Özcan, 2015, pp. 60-68, 77).

the banner of the "civilizing mission" were part of the West's effort to impose its own values as universal norms. Within this framework, Eastern societies were portrayed as backward, barbaric, and irrational—labels that served both to justify occupations and to facilitate the construction of Western identity. Russia, too, internalized this ideological discourse and pursued a similar "civilizing" strategy in the Caucasus and Turkestan. The expansionist policies initiated during the Tsarist period simultaneously displaced local populations physically and sought to transform them ideologically by targeting their cultural and linguistic identities. Through educational institutions, language policies, and settlement strategies, populations were subjected to Russification, while the very structure of the region was systematically reconfigured. The colonial powers attempt to transform local populations strictly under the guise of "civilizing" corresponds to the approach criticized by Popper as "Utopian social engineering". According to Popper, the attempt to control and reconstruct a society holistically is logically impossible and inevitably leads to oppression and violence. Russia's transformation projects in the Caucasus or the West's in the colonies stand as historical evidence of this holistic and utopian fallacy (Popper, 1964, p. 67-70). In this context, the concept of "civilization" became both the pretext and the mask of colonial violence. The writings of contemporary observers such as Vámbéry reveal the duplicity of the West: while championing freedom and progress, it simultaneously praised the "civilizing" of so-called barbarian peoples in the service of its own interests, thereby exposing the ideological face of imperialism. It is evident that this discourse was employed in similar ways by both Russia and Britain, and that colonial undertakings cloaked in the guise of civilization were in fact directly tied to economic and strategic interests.

Eurocentric Historiography and Orientalism

As noted in earlier sections with respect to the relationship between knowledge and power, those who advance and possess knowledge claim the right to determine and govern the fate of other communities. For this reason, the West has sought to elevate itself, its ancestors, and its civilization across all domains, times, and spaces. This attitude has been incorporated into modern historiography as Eurocentric historiography and historical understanding (Bıçak, 2015, p. 10). It has generally been defined as "*a condition that devalues other peoples while perceiving itself as possessing the right to control the world by applying its economic and political superiority—achieved after the Industrial Revolution—to all spheres of life*", and it is regarded as one of the major problematic in modern historical thought (Bıçak, 2015, p. 183). Debates on Eurocentric historiography have revolved around whether such an attitude exists and, if so, whether it can be justified. At the core of Eurocentrism lies a binary division of the world into European and non-European. One striking example can be found in Fernand Braudel's (1994, pp. v-viii) *A History of Civilizations* (first published in 1963 as *Histoire et Civilisations* and in 1987 as *Grammaire des Civilisations*), where the Islam and the Muslim World, Africa (referred to as the "Black Africa"), and the Far East (India, China, Japan) are examined under the heading "Civilizations Outside Europe". Europe and America, by contrast, are discussed within the section on "European Civilizations". Also included in this section are Australia and New Zealand (which can be considered the other side of the world compared to the lands under the rule of the Turks and Russians, located next to Europe) under the subheading of the English-speaking world. Meanwhile, Muscovy, Russia, and the USSR are placed under the heading of "European Civilizations", but—as noted in the previous section—are treated as the "Other Europe".

To grasp the Eurocentric mentality in its clearest form, it is sufficient to look at the following lines from the British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper's (1975, p. 11) *The Rise of Christian Europe*: "*It is European techniques, European examples, European ideas which have shaken the non-European world out of its past — out of barbarism in Africa, out of a far older, slower, more majestic civilization in Asia; and the history of the world, for the last five centuries, in so far as it has significance, has been European*

history. I do not think we need make any apology if our study of history is Europa-centric."

If we trace the roots of Eurocentric historiography, we may point to Polybius—taken to Rome as a hostage one hundred and fifty years after the death of Alexander—as having adopted a Romano-centric form of historiography that can be regarded as the precursor of Eurocentrism. Considered both the last and greatest historian of the Hellenistic age and one of the foremost historical writers of the Roman Republic, Polybius regarded Rome as a universal and irresistible power ruling the entire world. He placed Rome and its institutions at the very center of his universal history. Polybius even frequently warned his fellow citizens not to oppose Rome, but rather to accept its power and civilization and to give their consent to it (Doğancı, 2014, pp. 1167-1168). In Rome, one of the most important tasks of historiography was to exalt the virtues of Rome and the Romans in order to preserve Roman identity. The Roman historian Cato likewise stated that the true purpose of historiography was to support the "*proper way of life*"—more precisely, the "*Roman way of life*"—and to ensure that Romans took pride in their past (Bıçak, 2015, p. 31).

One of the most striking perceptual maneuvers in the West's attempt to rewrite history from a Eurocentric perspective is the notion of the "Dark Middle Ages". The historical periodization, itself entirely a Western construct, depicts the Middle Ages as the darkest era of history. According to conventional historiography, the collapse of antiquity—namely, the fall of the Roman Empire—was followed by the "Dark Ages". It must be asked for whom this age was dark. For whom were these centuries marked by darkness, and for whom by light? In fact, this was the very era in which Islam was born and when Muslims experienced what are today nostalgically remembered as times of political, scientific, and social flourishing. Moreover, the Turks not only seized Anatolia and the Balkans but also carried out incursions deep into the heart of Europe. Viewed from this perspective, it may be clear that the Middle Ages were indeed a period of darkness for the West; yet the fact that even the Turkic-Islamic world, with its own vibrant history, has internalized the phrase "Dark Middle Ages" is itself the product of a history shaped by Western construction. Through this stance, the West has polished and glorified its own past while concealing, obscuring, and, when convenient, denigrating the history and civilization of the East (Turkic-Islamic, African, Asian, North and South American). In doing so, it has, in Benedict Anderson's terms, fashioned an "imagined European community" (Traverso, 2013, p. 205; Anderson, 2006, p. 6). The label 'Dark Middle Ages' and the concealment of the rise of the Islamic world during this period are among the most prominent examples of Eurocentric historiography. This phenomenon of 'theft of history' was identified early on by Turkish thinkers. Çelik (2020, p. 25) draws attention to Şevket Süreyya Aydemir's 1932 article entitled "*Europacentrisme'in Tasfiyesi*" (The Elimination of Eurocentrism). In this article, Aydemir argues that dividing history into periods such as Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Modern Age is based on the assumption that 'everything outside Europe is dependent on Europe' and that this is directly linked to European colonialism. Imagined communities are collective constructs, often lacking a strictly national dimension, created to meet shared political, social, and cultural needs. In this context, the West produced a history tailored to its needs in order to present and reinforce its civilization as a unified whole. This historical construct not only consolidated internal solidarity in the West but also elevated it to a superior position vis-à-vis others. Through this process, a common past and identity were constructed, allowing the Western conception of civilization to be offered to the world as a universal value (Anderson, 2006, pp. 83-91, 150; Hobsbawm, 2009a, p. 339).

This constructed notion of historical superiority, when combined with the advances in science, technology, and industry in the modern era, laid the groundwork for the West's imposition of its civilizational standards as universal norms. The flourishing of science, technology, and industry in the modern West led to their acceptance as the primary criteria of civilization. Consequently, non-Western societies came to regard Westernization as an indispensable prerequisite for becoming "civilized". In

this way, Eurocentrism and imperialism became inseparable components of modern civilization. This process entailed the imposition of Western values as universal norms, compelling other societies to conform to them. As a result, under the guise of civilizational progress, colonialism and cultural domination were legitimized. Non-Western societies were estranged from their own particularities and integrated into a system that reinforced the ideological and economic supremacy of the West (Kalın, 2018, p. 109). The West's attempt to universalize its own values coincides with an inevitable imperialist impulse. As Cioran points out, every civilization tends to regard its own way of life as the only right and conceivable one. According to Cioran, a civilization's desire to impose its truths on the world is equivalent to "*an explicit or camouflaged soteriology; indeed, to an elegant imperialism.*" In this context, the Western civilizing mission, when accompanied by military enterprise, ceases to be 'elegant' and evolves into an instrument of domination driven by the perverse imperative to recreate the other in its own image (Cioran, 1996, p. 29).

One of the fruits of Eurocentric historiography is Orientalism. The West, with the responsibility it ascribed to itself as "civilized" and "rational", sought to understand the barbarians it had constructed—indeed, in a sense, invented—and from this effort emerged Orientalism. Yet because the West carried out this process of understanding and interpretation through its own concepts and standards, it reinforced othering, which had persisted since antiquity, and further entrenched boundaries. The fundamental reason for the birth and construction of Orientalism lies in the Western conviction—rooted in its subconscious—that the East was backward in comparison to the West (Kahraman, 2002, p. 166; Said, 1979, p. 204). But how did this conviction arise—or how was it produced—in the Western mind? To what extent did historical texts and the narratives derived from them contribute to this belief? The foundations of Western prejudice toward the East, its self-admiration, and its perception of the Easterner as "uncivilized" were laid by Greek civilization. The Greeks, admiring themselves and the peaceful, secure way of life enjoyed by the citizens of the polis, denigrated Eastern forms of life and governance. As a result, the concept of "Oriental Despotism" became deeply ingrained in the Western subconscious. This idea was based on the perceived despotism of the Persians—enemies of the Greeks at the time—and, by extension, of the Eastern peoples as a whole (Mardin, 2002, p. 118).

The East–West divide became scientized and entered the scholarly literature in the late eighteenth century, particularly with the emergence of Orientalism. Orientalism—that is, the Western mode of reading and perceiving the East—may be regarded as a discourse, an ideology, a worldview, or even a discipline of study. Yet at its core lies the "us–them" dualism[19] from the Western perspective (Kontny, 2002, p. 121). The most renowned figure on this subject, Edward Said, explains the creation and development of this dualism as follows: "*Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied—indeed, made truly productive—the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture.*" (Said, 1979, p. 6). What is most striking in Said's definition is his emphasis on Orientalism as a project sustained over generations. Among the vital arteries of this ongoing investment are (historical and literary) texts. The East is known and perceived through texts produced by the West. In other words, Said stresses that Western knowledge and judgment about the East are not formed on the basis of the real East but through the "stereotypical discourses" constructed in texts. For the information contained in texts eventually generates "discourse". Thus, Western knowledge of the

[19] While monism maintains that all beings originate from a single substance, dualism posits the existence of two distinct substances that cannot be reduced to one another. Taking this into account, Westerners have claimed that the West and the East arose and developed from different substances—that they are fundamentally different—and thus have articulated, in the simplest form, the "us–them / Orient–Occident" divide.

East is an artificial image, constructed through texts about the East (Said, 1979, pp. 5-6, 92-100; Çırakman, 2002, pp. 192-193). These immutable and stereotypical images of the East produced by the West correspond to the error defined by Karl Popper as methodological essentialism. According to Popper, essentialism is the search for an unchanging identity or essence within changing historical processes. Orientalist discourse, by ignoring the transformations of Eastern societies within the flow of history, attributes to them a primordial and eternal essence of backwardness; thus, it denies historical change and reduces the East to a stagnant object (Popper, 1964, pp. 27-30).

The profound impact of this textual construction is evident in its internalization by colonized intellectuals themselves. S. Kalkan (2024) demonstrates this by showing how the British Orientalist narrative of a "despotic" and "decayed" Baburid empire was adopted by local modernist reformers in India. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the leader of the Aligarh Movement, echoed this Orientalist framework in his own writings, describing the pre-British indigenous rule as "despotic" and a form of "mitigated slavery". This adoption of the colonial historical narrative by the colonized elite highlights the successful operation of the knowledge/power nexus, where the "other" comes to view their own past through the lens created by the colonizer (Kalkan, 2024, pp. 132-133). The distorted and incomplete knowledge of the East produced by the West was also recognized and actively criticized by intellectuals from the societies positioned as the "Other". The roots of this critical discourse, in fact, predate Edward Said by several decades. One of the most notable examples is Namık Kemal's famous 1872 essay "*Avrupa Şark'ı Bilmez*" (Europe Does Not Know the Orient). In this work, Namık Kemal directly challenged the Eurocentric conception of history, arguing that even the writings of esteemed European historians such as Hammer were filled with "ignorant and baseless narratives". This critical stance was later echoed by Tevfik Fikret, who emphasized that Europeans passed judgment not only on the Orient but even on the Turkish language itself without possessing any genuine understanding of it (Çelik, 2020, pp. 13-23). The entirety of this knowledge of the East, acquired and interpreted through such texts, is filled with distorted, incomplete, and erroneous perceptions. This idea, which constitutes part of Said's definition of Orientalism, lies at the center of the criticisms directed against him (Çırakman, 2002, p. 190). Yet, once the phrase "the entirety of" is removed, what remains is a rather accurate and compelling statement that leaves little room for criticism. In fact, the main objection raised against Said is that, while he rightly underscores the wholesale judgment imposed upon the East by orientalist thought, he in turn judges Orientalists and the West as though they were a single unified subject. Supporting the validity of such critiques, numerous scholars and historians—including political scientist Hobson, historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto, architectural historian Deborah Howard, and literary historian Jerry Brotton—have emphasized the many and significant contributions of the East to the development of Western civilization as it exists today.

The Europeanization of Europe—the process through which Europe, once a merely geographical term, acquired a cultural meaning (a topic to be discussed in detail in the following section)—parallels the way in which, as analyzed by Edward Said and his successors, Europeans orientalized the East. While Europe and the West were self-defined, the concept of the East was not shaped by Eastern peoples themselves but rather constructed through the discourses of colonial powers (Hasse, 2024, p. 27). Thus, the Orient was Orientalized. Orientalist discourse served as the instrument for rendering the Orient as 'Oriental' in a caricatured manner (Yeğenoğlu, 2003, p. 23). In sum, Orientalism is the continual evaluation of the East by the West as a subordinate (Mardin, 2002, p. 117). The reflections of this hierarchical gaze are evident in historiography, as illustrated in the examples above. The West, positioning itself as "superior", assumes the right to label the Eastern world, to measure and determine its value. Even today, the West continues to categorize the world in such terms as "Third World", "underdeveloped", or "developing Asian countries".

The Destructive Potential of "Civilization"

Despite all of the West's constructed claims to superiority, the propaganda of a "progressive and civilized" civilization in reality carries a destructive quality, both materially and spiritually. For the wars and deaths witnessed both in history and in the present are not the work of those societies accused of barbarism, but rather of the so-called "civilized" world, which has fought among itself over colonies and in order to expand its hegemony over others. E. M. Cioran (2017, p. 93) depicts this face of civilization in a dramatic and hyperbolic style: "*Within what is called civilization, there undeniably reigns a demonic principle, one whose presence humanity perceives far too late...*"

With this statement, he underscores that civilization should be remembered not only for progress and prosperity, but also for its darker and destructive aspects. Of course, we need not reject (Western) civilization outright or in such stark terms by focusing solely on this dimension. Yet, when one considers the crimes and injustices committed in the name of civilization, it becomes clear—between the lines of historical events—that civilization has not always served the advancement of humanity (or of the West) but has at times functioned as an instrument of oppression, exploitation, and violence (Kalın, 2018, p. 267).

As can be seen, the West has, at different moments in history, treated historiography almost as an ally, employing it to its own ends. Yet despite the fabricated and rewritten versions of history, the grandeur of past civilizations that were destroyed or sought to be concealed remains evident. The very statistics of the world governed by the West also reveal how "civilized" it truly was. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski's calculations, the number of mass deaths worldwide between 1914 and 1990 amounted to approximately 187 million. Considering the world's population in 1914, this figure corresponds to 9 percent—meaning that nearly one in every ten people perished as a result of wars and massacres (Hobsbawm, 2009a, p. 317). The perpetrators of this devastation were not so-called savage barbarians devoid of humanity, but rather the governments of the "civilized" world—those who, unable to agree on how to divide their colonies and eager to expand their hegemony over the "other", turned against one another.

Although the traces of the First and Second World Wars, along with the catastrophe of the Holocaust, have not yet fully faded—a century being a rather short span in the history of humanity and civilization—the words Europe and the West continue to evoke, for many people, an image of freedom of thought and religion, equality, and, with reference to the European Union, a community "united in diversity". Yet it is clear that such a perception is an overly optimistic one (Hasse, 2024, p. 7). Moreover, the very notion of Europe has become an exclusionary concept—one that has been historically and geographically distorted. Reducing Classical Greek and Roman cultures to symbolic metonyms such as Athens and Rome—or Acropolis and Capitol—constitutes a misleading Eurocentric distortion that obscures the true character of these civilizations. Such terminology presents them as if they were exclusively European power centers. Yet what distinguishes the ancient Greek and Roman cultural spheres is precisely their capacity to connect three continents, both geographically and intellectually. This becomes evident in the example of the renowned Greek astronomer, astrologer, and cartographer Claudius Ptolemy. Ptolemy lived in Alexandria, in the Roman province of Egypt, during the second century CE—just as the mathematician Euclid had done four centuries earlier, or the poet Callimachus, often considered one of the most significant philologists in world history. As the name 'Claudius' indicates, Ptolemy was a Greek who held Roman citizenship. It is therefore historically and conceptually inaccurate to categorize Ptolemy, Euclid, or Callimachus as "European". A similar misconception arises in the case of Herodotus, regarded as the founder of European historiography. Herodotus was a native of Halicarnassus in southwestern Anatolia, in present-day Türkiye—thus geographically an Asian. While it may appear paradoxical that the founding figure of European historiography was Asian,

identifying him as such is just as erroneous as labeling Homer of Smyrna[20] "European". Underlying this misperception is the longstanding orientation of European cultural narratives toward Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome, and the resulting tendency to evaluate both Greek and Roman antiquity through the narrow lens of these three centers (Hasse, 2024, pp. 31, 40-42). In this way, the integrative, transcontinental character of the Greek and Roman worlds is neglected—indeed, in some cases deliberately marginalized—rendering invisible their fundamental role in linking three continents.

Figure 3. Greek and Roman UNESCO World Heritage Sites in North Africa and West Asia (Hasse, 2024, p. 40)

For in the Middle Ages, the concept of Europe was used primarily as a geographical term; the notion of Europeanness did not yet exist. When referring to the idea of "us," expressions such as "we Christians" or "we Latins" were commonly employed. Although Europe and the West trace their cultural foundations back to Ancient Greek civilization, it is hardly possible to find any sense or discourse of "we Europeans" in antiquity. Even in later periods—that is, from the Middle Ages through the early modern era—the approximate borders of Europe were defined as follows: the Strait of Gibraltar, the Mediterranean Sea, the Bosporus, and the Don River, which flows into the Sea of Azov east of Crimea (some, however, identified the Aras or Rioni Rivers in the Caucasus as Europe's eastern boundary instead of the Don). Beginning in the eighteenth century, the Ural Mountains came to replace these rivers as the conventional eastern limit of Europe. In its geographical sense, the concept of Europe first emerged as a form of consensus identified among Greek writers, notably Anaximander of Miletus (Hasse, 2024, pp. 8-12, 38, 39). Considering not only the historical transformations but also the contemporary notions of Europe and Europeanness, the accuracy of the statement "there are no given spaces; spaces are invented" becomes evident. For the question of how far Europe extends is not a geographical one, but rather a political and cultural issue. Overseas colonial expansion by European powers profoundly shaped both the concept of 'the European' and perceptions thereof. Europe was continually compared with other continents, and these comparisons were most often resolved in Europe's favor. In this way, the idea of the 'superior white European' assumed a normative position in people's minds (Hasse, 2024, p. 16).

[20] İzmir in Türkiye present day.

The concept of cultural Europe has two founding figures: one being Charlemagne, often referred to as the "Father of Europe"[21] (Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa, 1966), and the other Pope Pius II, who is credited with coining the term "European" in 1458. The Pope used the concept of "European" explicitly in opposition to the Turks (Piccolominei [Pope Pius II], 2001, p. 27). By defining Europe as the community of Christians, he called upon Christian princes to expel the Turks not only from Europe but, more importantly, from Constantinople itself. However, despite Pope Pius II's early invention of the term, the concept began to be used—and indeed became fashionable—only from the seventeenth century onward. The phrase "*affaires de l'Europe*" frequently appears, for instance, in the correspondence between French ambassadors stationed in the Ottoman Empire and Paris. By this time, "Christianity" had been replaced by "Europeans". The emerging notion of a cultural Europe explicitly excluded both the Ottoman Empire and the Turks, even though its capital, Constantinople, geographically lay within the European continent. Thus, the image of a "Europe without Turks and Muslims"[22] became officially institutionalized—a perception that has persisted to this day (Yapp, 1992, p. 143).

Through the rise of Orientalism and the formation of this new definition of Europe, both Muslim Europe and Christian Orthodox Europe were excluded.[23] In this sense, Europe ceased to be unifying and instead became divisive and exclusionary (Hasse, 2024, pp. 27-29). Consequently, an East distinct from the West—and even an Orient distinct from the East itself—came into being. The clearest example of Europe being compared to other continents, which is ultimately in Europe's favor, and where we see the idea of a "superior white European" can be found in Zedler's encyclopedia. In the entry on Europe, the concept is initially defined in geographical terms but ultimately transforms into a cultural one. The transition from a geographical to a cultural framework is marked by the following statement: "*Although Europe is the smallest of the four parts of the world, it nevertheless surpasses the others for various reasons...*" It continues: "*The Europeans, through their skill and courage, have brought the most perfect regions of the world under their control.*" Ultimately, this leads to the conclusion that Europe is the place where the most civilized and powerful people live (Zedler, 1731-1754, p. 2191-2196).

Contrary to the propaganda of an advanced and civilized Western civilization, the West not only destroyed other civilizations but also denied their existence and histories, continually defining these societies as "primitive" and "savage". While materially devastating the civilizations of the old world, the West also sought, on a spiritual level, to erase their historical legacies and cultural values; in the aftermath of this destruction, it imposed its own civilization as the "new world" (Césaire, 2005, pp. 50-55). Within this order, all cultures and civilizations outside Europe and North America were regarded as incomplete entities that had failed to Westernize and thus needed to be completed. As noted above, this perception continues into the present. Through this ideological discourse, the West has sought to legitimize its superiority not only in the past but also within the global modern world order.

The root cause of all this lies largely in the West's distorted knowledge about others and in its insincerity in attempting to understand those who are different from itself. This, in turn, stems from centuries of othering, which has led to increasing estrangement among peoples—in other words, a vicious cycle has emerged. Societies have othered one another because of differences; as a result of this

[21] Pater europae. The work *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa*, commonly known as the 'Paderborn Epic' is an anonymous Latin epic composed around the year 799. Its author is unknown and is therefore regarded as anonymous. The epic recounts Pope Leo III's visit to Charlemagne (Karolus Magnus) in Paderborn.

[22] In the XXI. century, the European press continues to debate whether Türkiye, with only a small portion of its territory on the European continent, should be considered part of Europe at all. It is frequently argued that integrating a country whose population is overwhelmingly Muslim could undermine the cultural and civilizational identity of the European Union. In news coverage, the European media often imply that the religious and cultural differences between Türkiye and Europe represent a major obstacle to accession. This culturalist discourse—which persistently emphasizes Türkiye's distinct religious and cultural position—constitutes the most influential source of opposition to Türkiye's membership within Europe (Birekul, 2009, p. 83).

[23] This situation is closely related to the earlier section of the study, *Russia as the West's East and the 'Other' Europeans.*

othering, they have become further alienated; and this alienation has, in turn, broadened the boundaries of othering. Over thousands of years, Westerners have themselves come to believe the lies they told and the propaganda they produced. Fontana even offers a striking example of this in linguistic terms: "*In North America there are still people who believe that Jesus spoke English.*" (Fontana, 2003, p. 116). As a consequence of Eurocentric historical thought, whose subject is the West itself, the horizons of people in the West are confined within the "civilization" in which they are trapped, leaving them ignorant of the beauties of the rest of the world. Today, this attitude and problem persist. For, in the eyes of intellectuals, politicians, and the public that believes them, society and the civilization currently dominant in the world are perpetually confronted with the danger posed by the barbarian—that is, the "other" (Muslims, Islam, terrorism, refugees, etc.). As Fontana (2003, p. 16) observes, for people mired in the swamp of politics, it is easier "*to erect once again the old scarecrow of the decline of Rome.*" This scarecrow merely changes its attire according to the conditions of the period. Yet the scarecrow of the West has always been the East and the Easterner. Fontana's metaphor of the scarecrow, in fact, directly parallels Gramsci's view that a hegemonic power, in order to consolidate its hegemony and unite society around itself, constructs an "enemy" or "threat".

As a literary and powerful conclusion, the following poem by Cavafy strikingly reveals the imaginary and regulative function of the barbarians in social and political life.

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?
The barbarians are due here today.
Because the barbarians are coming today
and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking.
Why this sudden bewilderment, this confusion?
(How serious people's faces have become.)
Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,
everyone going home lost in thought?
Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven't come.
And some of our men just in from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.
Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution. (Cavafy, 1978, pp. 14-15).

Barbarians, constructed as an external threat, came to function as an element shaping the identity, unity, and order of society. Yet in the poem, when people learn that the barbarians are not coming—and, in fact, that they never existed—rather than rejoicing, they are seen to grieve. The reason for this reaction is that the absence of barbarians also removes the very ground upon which society defined and legitimized itself. As an "other", the barbarians created a counterforce that maintained order, held society together, and shaped collective identity. The disappearance of this threat produced a sense of emptiness, for one of the principal means by which society defined and motivated itself had vanished. The invention of the barbarian as an "other" thus carried a profound social function, and the absence of this imaginary figure could itself generate a crisis—something powerfully illustrated through literary expression (Kalın, 2018, p. 8). As an ancient imperial philosophy of the West, civilization had no meaning without barbarians: the civilized required the uncivilized—the barbarian—in order to be

recognized as civilized. For in the cosmos, everything exists by virtue of its opposite.

CONCLUSION

Historical evidence demonstrates that the discourse of "civilizing" has never been confined to the past but has functioned as a recurring ideological instrument, continuously adapted to new political and cultural contexts. From the Greeks and Romans to medieval Christianity, from the Enlightenment to modern imperialism, the West consistently mobilized historiography to legitimize its claim of superiority over the East. By constructing the East as despotic, stagnant, and barbaric, Western narratives simultaneously elevated their own image as progressive, rational, and civilized. This process reveals that historiography is not merely a record of events but an arena where power relations are produced and reproduced. Furthermore, the potency of this discourse is such that even nations historically marginalized as the 'Other' by Europe—such as Russia—have internalized and reproduced these very Orientalist paradigms to legitimize their own expansionist agendas in the Caucasus and Turkestan (Central Asia). This demonstrates that the 'civilizing mission' is not merely a geographic inheritance of the West, but a transferable apparatus of power.

In contemporary settings, interventions framed in the language of democracy, human rights, or freedom often replicate earlier civilizing missions, demonstrating the persistence of historical patterns under different terminologies. This historiographical dominance functions not only by exalting the West but by actively erasing the constitutive role of the "Other"—effectively committing a "theft of history". The civilizing discourse, therefore, remains a potent tool for sustaining global hierarchies, even as its outward forms evolve. Recognizing this continuity underscores the necessity of critical reflection and historical awareness in confronting Eurocentric paradigms.

Ultimately, civilization should not be conceived as the exclusive possession of any single culture (hars[24]) or as a linear measure of progress. Rather, it emerges from the cumulative contributions of diverse traditions, experiences, and practices that shape distinct cultural identities. Nations inherit customs and norms from their histories, and through their interaction and exchange, these legacies collectively give rise to what we call civilization. In this respect, civilization is less an index of advancement than a dynamic synthesis of values forged through dialogue among cultures. The task of historiography, therefore, is not to reinforce narratives of dominance but to illuminate the plural foundations of civilization and foster a more inclusive understanding of humanity's shared past. Thus, while the East and the West retain their particularities, the broader trajectory of civilization reflects the entangled and reciprocal contributions of both.

[24] In Turkish, the concept of *hars*, as interpreted by Ziya Gökalp, has both points of convergence and divergence with civilization. *Hars* is national, whereas civilization is international. *Hars* refers to the harmonious whole of a single nation's religious, moral, legal, linguistic, economic, and scientific life. Civilization, by contrast, represents the collective whole of the social lives of multiple nations. For example, while there exists a common European or Western civilization, individual nations also possess their own *hars*—such as the French *hars* or the German *hars* (Gökalp, 2015, p. 46). Gökalp's distinction between *hars* and civilization bears significant resemblance to the Kultur–Zivilisation dichotomy articulated in German thought, especially by Ferdinand Tönnies. In this tradition, *Kultur* signifies the organic, historically rooted, and national aspects of a people's life, whereas *Zivilisation* denotes the more universal, technical, and outward-facing achievements of humanity. Gökalp's formulation thus parallels this European discourse, yet localizes it within the Turkish intellectual tradition by employing *hars* as the counterpart to *Kultur* while situating civilization in a cosmopolitan, transnational register. Tönnies never directly refers to this dichotomy as 'Kultur–Zivilisation' under a systematic heading. This concept later becomes explicitly a 'Dichotomie' as conceptualised by thinkers such as Thomas Mann, Alfred Weber, and Norbert Elias. Tönnies anticipates the later German distinction between 'Kultur' and 'Zivilisation' through his differentiation of organic community and mechanical society (Tönnies, 1887).

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Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Sustainable Development Goals: 10 Reduced Inequalities

Sustainable Development Goals: 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

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