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**THE ENEMY AS BARBARIAN**

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**Abstract**

*The power's need for real or invented enemies generates mechanisms of hatred. Part of Sternberg & Sternberg's duplex theory of hate, the "table of stories" includes an enduring narrative in Western ideology, often paired with atrocity propaganda: the "barbarian story", in which Huns (with or without quotes) played a major role until as late as the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A lucid witness of catastrophic 20<sup>th</sup>-century events, George Orwell often exposed the errors and crimes of all sides of conflicts. Recent shifts in Western ideology and political vocabulary towards a sanitized representation of the enemy may have profound repercussions in political struggles.*

**Keywords:** Hatred; barbarity; dehumanization; Huns; Orwell.

**Manufacturing an enemy**

Stereotyping an out-group may be either the result of poor knowledge and prejudice, or the sign of a deliberate and pragmatic wish to depersonalize its members with the aim of attacking them. Whichever the case, leveling distinctions among individuals is always helpful in preparing the ground for destruction. Depriving the out-group of individuality is essential, because the absence of a "body image" makes it easier to hate, whereas an individual body image arouses some pain in the perpetrator (Allport 1992:32). Sadly, even when the out-group is well-known, stereotyping will still function as a social construction that maintains "society's conception of itself" (Mohr

1992:169) and morphs into a common-sense assumption, becoming part of the prevailing ideology.

Besides uniformization, another crucial factor at work is dehumanization. Analyzed elsewhere, alongside diffusion of responsibility, obedience to authority, and anonymity dehumanization is a major crime facilitator. Normally, a dangerous out-group may appear as “different” or non-human to the threatened in-group. But the sequence can be reversed, especially if the reversal serves particular interests. In this case, once the targeted group has been depicted as physically repulsive and/or morally corrupt, in brief, dehumanized, anything may be added, including fabrications. At this point, it is not the group’s possibly threatening character that brings out its otherness, but the other way around (Eco 2011:11). Ascribing imagined features and deeds to the out-group, thus putting even more distance between one’s group and the “others”, paves the way for aggression against *any* group, at any time, for any reason.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Eurasian prisoners are devoid of personality and emotions:

“In the trucks little yellow men in shabby greenish uniforms were squatting, jammed close together. Their sad, Mongolian faces gazed out over the sides of the trucks utterly incurious” (Orwell 1976:811).

Their ostensible “sadness” is not a feeling, but mere physiognomy. Oceania’s intermittent foe, the Eurasian soldier, represented in posters “striding forward with expressionless Mongolian face and enormous boots, a submachine gun pointed from his hip” (Orwell 1976:832), is not only an impending threat, but also a non-individual at several different levels: his race, indistinguishable as individuals; his uniform and his job in the army, a leveler by necessity and tradition; mass multiplication of his image; and his symbolic status as a subject of propaganda. As a rule, even when not part of war propaganda, posters of soldiers are an epitome of depersonalization.

In contrast with the Eurasian army, the other, *permanent*, Enemy of Big Brother and the People of Oceania, the renegade Emmanuel Goldstein, is individualized as a lone, unarmed intellectual with the face and voice of a sheep (Orwell 1976:749). These harmless individual attributes, however, are not enough to clear him of the blame for everything that threatens or goes wrong in Oceania, because he is also a member of a group traditionally uniformized, sometimes dehumanized, and treated as the qualified suspect – he is Jewish.

As both memories of the Asian invader and the strategic need to depict enemies of whatever origin as barbaric people have been very powerful in the European mindset since antiquity, even neighboring, racially related people often came to be labeled as Huns or Mongols, who thus became prototypic enemies.

In *The Nature of Hate*, Sternberg & Sternberg describe several roles played by real or imaginary enemies in hate stories. These stories, part of their duplex theory of hate, generate three components of hate (negation of intimacy, passion, and commitment, i.e. the triangle of hate, the other part of the theory) whose proportions, intensity and duration vary with the situational context. The story of the enemy regarded as a barbarian (opposed to the civilized “us”), included in Sternberg & Sternberg’s “table of stories”, incites all three components of the triangle of hate, thus being one of the most efficient.

### **Ancient barbarians**

Defining the enemy in terms of barbarity is as old as history, but has not always been used to demean. Although ancient Greeks divided the world into Greeks and barbarians (βάρβαροι), the latter term indicated the linguistic difference, not necessarily a state of inferiority.

While he concedes that any people may consider the other peoples as barbarians, giving Egyptians as example, Herodotus nonetheless takes the Greeks’ superiority for granted (Isaac 2004:263), a belief later upheld by Aristotle as well.

Plato’s *Republic* (Book V) draws a clear distinction between Greeks and non-Greeks: when Hellenes fight among themselves, “Hellas is then in a state of disorder and discord, they being by nature friends; and such enmity is to be called discord.” But when they fight with barbarians, they are at war, because they are “by nature enemies” (Plato 2001:309). By nature? Something intrinsic about foreigners, from the way they look and dress to their customs and language clashes with the Greek way, “our” way. Plato sees otherness as an inherent threat, echoing Eco’s observation. Yet foreigners were not all undistinguishable, and sometimes Greeks would disparagingly call fellow Greeks “barbarians”.

At the same time, the widespread view that people unable to organize themselves in advanced societies based on the rule of law were inferior had as a corollary the right to enslave them. In *Politics*, Aristotle harbored no doubt that non-Greeks were natural slaves, and that prisoners caught in wars were thus only fulfilling their destiny. Logically, wars were legitimate,

and often little more than animal hunting. In this sense, the *Nicomachean Ethics* takes another step towards dehumanizing non-Greeks, asserting that, whereas an animal-like character is exceptional among Greeks, and only due to disease, it is typical of foreigners as groups (Isaac 2004:199).

Aristotle's advice to treat barbarians as animals and plants was nonetheless dismissed by Alexander the Great, who, for political purposes, adopted Eastern practices after his conquest of the Persian Empire. In Gruen's opinion, "Alexander evidently eschewed any notions of ethnic inferiority among 'barbarians'" (Gruen 2012:68).

Having studied nature closely, Aristotle could not have missed the fact that animals do not behave like the people he considered inferior, nor do they share personalities with humans. Stereotyping animals into human types or vice versa, whether in philosophy or in fables, blatantly disregards hard facts. The notion that a lion may hold down or postpone its killer instinct for some uncertain future reward, and that a mouse with an even keener foresight may make a promise and keep it, as in Aesop's fables, is ludicrous if stripped of the allegorical pedagogy. But even "serious" proverbs like *homo homini lupus* go wide of the mark: being pack hunters, wolves survive through cooperation and sharing. In this light, the ancient Plautian – and Hobbesian – dictum appears as "a questionable statement about our own species based on false assumptions about another species" (de Waal 2009:4).

Despite a number of counterexamples from major authors such as Cicero and Livy provided by Gruen (2012:343-344), Romans did not hold a conspicuously disparaging view of foreigners. In fact, unlike Greeks or Jews, they did not even have a collective noun for foreigners, and had to borrow the Greek "barbarians", a group to which they ironically belonged themselves. Gruen's remark: "Distinctiveness of blood or heritage never took hold as part of the Roman self-conception" (Gruen 2012:345) must be juxtaposed to his conclusion that Greek states generally "acknowledged, evidently without difficulty, their roots in non-Hellenic peoples" (Gruen 2012:238).

Even if Aristotle's view was later disputed by Eratosthenes, who preferred to divide the world into well-governed and poorly-governed states, rather than Greeks and non-Greeks, and by Stoics like Seneca, who, without opposing slavery, advocated better treatment of slaves (Isaac 2004:186), both Greeks and Romans normally assumed their supremacy as a natural law, without the need for explanation.

In that sense, for instance, there is a significant difference between antiquity and modernity in both the justification and the consequences of comparing the enemy to animals. According to Isaac,

“Although mass murder was not uncommon in antiquity, it is clear that there was no emotional need to portray the victims as animals in order to justify large-scale extermination” (Isaac 2004:201).

As modern man and regimes have had to adjust to new religious, political, and other types of constraints, the assault against the targeted group had to be cloaked in more elaborate, though no less cruel, rationalizations.

### **Atrocity stories**

Atrocity stories played a major role in associating barbarism with cruelty. The mayhem reportedly perpetrated by the Turks in the Eastern Roman Empire signaled a different kind of barbarism, one that no longer meant just otherness, lack of civilization, or unintelligibility, and became the subject of a sermon delivered in 1095 at the Council of Clermont by Pope Urban II, which purportedly sparked the First Crusade. Although doubts persist as to the efficacy of the sermon, given that it was delivered in Latin to an audience that is believed to have included many illiterate Frankish people, it was tantamount to a call to arms. The Pope’s own written version of the sermon has been lost. What we do have is five different versions, the most ferocious of which is Robert the Monk’s:

“They circumcise the Christians, and the blood of the circumcision they either spread upon the altars or pour into the vases of the baptismal font. When they wish to torture people by a base death, they perforate their navels, and dragging forth the extremity of the intestines, bind it to a stake; then with flogging they lead the victim around until the viscera having gushed forth the victim falls prostrate upon the ground. Others they bind to a post and pierce with arrows” [Et cetera] (Robert the Monk c. 1120).

But the scenario of Robert the Monk who, like Balderic, wrote more than ten years after the synod of Clermont, “and in order to revise the *Gesta Francorum* [the chronicle of the First Crusade] stylistically”, while also supporting “a new campaign to the Holy Land which was backed up by the French court”, is not corroborated by non-narrative sources (Strack 2012:44). On the other hand, all the five sources do associate the Muslim invaders’ deeds with barbarism, e.g. Fulcher of Chartres: “Let those who have been fighting against their brothers and relatives

now fight in a proper way against the barbarians” (Fulcher of Chartres 11<sup>th</sup> c.); Balderic, or Baudri, archbishop of Dol: “the Temple of Solomon, nay of the Lord, in which the barbarous nations placed their idols contrary to law, human and divine” (Balderic of Dol early 12<sup>th</sup> c.); and Urban II himself, in a “Letter of Instruction to the Crusaders” of December 1095: “a barbaric fury has deplorably afflicted and laid waste the churches of God in the regions of the Orient” (Urban II 1095).

Sometimes, as in the case of medieval Mongols, who thrive on their scary reputation, atrocity stories were disseminated on purpose by the perpetrators themselves as a tactic of deterrence. Modern killologists, on the other hand, consider atrocity – the “close-range murder of the innocent and helpless” (Grossman 2009:229) counterproductive in that it enhances the targeted group’s determination to resist.

The importance of atrocity propaganda is well known in Oceania too: a museum in Victory Square displays “waxwork tableaux illustrating enemy atrocities”, Julia’s Fiction Department must switch from fiction to atrocity pamphlets in preparation for Hate Week, and a zealous speaker “haranguing the crowd” denounces Eurasian atrocities during Hate Week (Orwell 1976:801, 831, 851).

The subject was quite familiar to Orwell from the British propaganda that equated Germans with Huns in the two world wars, as shown further below.

Germans were not so much ethnically or culturally different from their British and French enemies as to be labeled “barbarians”, so the atrocity stories that targeted them in World War I could not possibly be grounded in their “otherness” as an a priori threat. In fact, their invasion of France did pose a terrible, impending existential threat, in a reversal of Eco’s model. Although the objectives of Urban II and British propaganda were identical, i.e. a call to arms to fight an invader, in WWI a real imminent danger prompted the construction and misuse of “otherness”, not the other way around. Who were – or better, had been – the real Huns?

### **The bad Huns**

In *Roman History* XXXI.II.11, almost one century before the climax of their power, Ammianus gave one of the early descriptions of the Huns, one that may fit any “barbaric” population habitually compared to “brute beasts”:

“In truces they are treacherous and inconstant, being liable to change their minds at every breeze of every fresh hope which presents itself, giving themselves up wholly to the impulse and inclination of the moment; and, like brute beasts, they are utterly ignorant of the distinction between right and wrong. They express themselves with great ambiguity and obscurity; have no respect for any religion or superstition whatever; are immoderately covetous of gold; and are so fickle and irascible, that they very often on the same day that they quarrel with their companions without any provocation, again become reconciled to them without any mediator” (Ammianus A.D. 375).

Keystone virtues of the Roman civilization, such as morality, reliability, modesty, respect of gods, self-restraint, were unknown or irrelevant to the Huns, because the Huns were different. They were “the offspring of *daemonia immunda*” (Mèanchen-Helfen 1973:5), and in the broader context of the “eschatological wave” that associated the fall of Rome with the end of the world, haunting the late 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, the most likely materialization of Western fears, hence the preferred target of demonization.

The following description written by a Goth one century after the Hunnic empire had vanished, when stories about Huns were already turning into legends, has been the source of many later perceptions of this ephemeral people as the most cruel “wild beasts” to have overrun Europe:

“(XXIV) (127) For by the terror of their features they inspired great fear in those whom perhaps they did not really surpass in war. They made their foes flee in horror because their swarthy aspect was fearful, and they had, if I may call it so, a sort of shapeless lump, not a head, with pin-holes rather than eyes. Their hardihood is evident in their wild appearance, and they are beings who are cruel to their children on the very day they are born. For they cut the cheeks of the males with a sword, so that before they receive the nourishment of milk they must learn to endure wounds. (128) Hence they grow old beardless and their young men are without comeliness, because a face furrowed by the sword spoils by its scars the natural beauty of a beard. They are short in stature, quick in bodily movement, alert horsemen, broad shouldered, ready in the use of bow and arrow, and have firm-set necks which are ever erect in pride. Though they live in the form of men, they have the cruelty of wild beasts” (Jordanes 6<sup>th</sup> century).

A further century later, in his chronicle of the reign of Emperor Maurice (582-602), the Byzantine historiographer Theophylact Simocatta described the Huns as the most faithless and greediest of all the nomads (Simocatta 1985:23).

All the sources converge in attesting to the Huns' barbarity. In no case do Huns seem a case of Fundamental Attribution Error (Sternberg & Sternberg 2008:41), i.e. being wrongly imputed a disposition to destruction and evil. However, some later voices deny the Huns' ferocity.

### **Attila's multifaceted personality**

The parallel positive evaluation of the Huns may be due to their being cast in the role of God's instruments of punishment against evildoers. In *Historia Francorum (History of the Franks)*, the apostles Peter and Paul themselves declare that

“For the sin of the people has grown great, and the outcry of their wickedness ascends to the presence of God; therefore this city [Metz] shall be burned with fire” by Attila's Huns (Gregory of Tours 6<sup>th</sup> c.).

Positioning Attila as “the scourge of God”, an expression coined in the 7<sup>th</sup> century by Isidore of Seville, laid the ground for a more favorable approach, culminating with the adoption by Hungarians of Attila and the Huns as mythical ancestors in *Gesta Hungarorum*: “King Attila, from whose line Duke Álmos, father of Árpád, descended” (Anonymous 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c.). The Hungarian national anthem, *Himnusz*, written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and still in use, identifies Hungarians as “the sons of Bendeguz”, Attila's father.

In fact, three different images of Attila have coexisted in the European cultural space, sometimes in the framework of the same source: the “neutral” (Nordic sagas, the German *Hildebrandslied* and *Nibelungenlied*, and other medieval texts); the “cruel” (ancient sources, e.g. Jordanes XXXV.181:

“But though he increased his power by this shameful means, yet by the balance of justice he received the hideous consequences of his own cruelty”,

countless legends circulating in Western Europe, as the Church regarded him primarily as an anti-Christian heathen, the Old Norse tradition, Scandinavian literature, the Dutch legend of Sint Servaes by Hendrik van Veldeke); and the “great warrior” and “hero” (Jordanes XXXIV.178: “a man marvellous for his glorious fame among all nations” and XL.212:



“He did nothing cowardly, like one that is overcome, but with clash of arms sounded the trumpets and threatened an attack. He was like a lion pierced by hunting spears, who paces to and fro before the mouth of his den and dares not spring, but ceases not to terrify the neighborhood by his roaring”, the *Nibelungenlied*, the tales of Dietrich von Bern) (Gerritsen & Van Melle 2000:44-47).

### **The modern “Huns” and their controversial helmets**

Notwithstanding, the negative expressive value of Huns, like that of Vandals, was so powerful that it survived for fifteen centuries, long enough to be used by 20<sup>th</sup> century propaganda. Which side would be targeted by it was probably decided at the turn of the century, following an angry speech delivered by Kaiser Wilhelm II in Bremerhaven before the German troops sent to China to quell the Boxer rebellion, on 27 July 1900. The official version of the German Foreign Office omitted the chauvinistic paragraph that ended it:

“Should you encounter the enemy, he will be defeated! No quarter will be given! Prisoners will not be taken! Whoever falls into your hands is forfeited. Just as a thousand years ago the Huns under their King Attila made a name for themselves, one that even today makes them seem mighty in history and legend, may the name German be affirmed by you in such a way in China that no Chinese will ever again dare to look cross-eyed at a German” (Prenzler n.d.:2.209-212).

By assimilating the Huns with his own people, the Kaiser’s speech overturned the traditional expressive value.

A few years later, when World War I broke out, British war propaganda turned this association to its advantage, with the unexpected help of military uniform designers: the spiked helmets of the German troops (*Pickelhauben*) were reminiscent of the Huns’ headgear represented in many works of art and books.

Those useful misleading descriptions aside, the subject deserves some clarification, since the representation of spike-helmeted Huns is by no means unanimous. The Huns’ headgear is mentioned by Ammianus (XXXI.II.6) as “round caps”, probably “a goatskin cap, often with earflaps, or a felt hat trimmed with fox skin” (Fields 2006:29). Hildinger (2001:65) describes their helmets as “spangenhelm”, i.e. “a conical helmet of four or six sections joined together and reinforced by bands over the joins”, a view shared by Mèanchen-Helfen, who relies on works by

six independent authors. However, there is little physical evidence to prove the helmet's shape, since finding an authentic Hunnic helmet in a grave is almost impossible: "like armor – they were very costly and handed down from generation to generation" (Mèanchen-Helfen 1973:251).

The "round cap" appears in Caravaggio's *The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula* (1610, Palazzo Zevallos, Naples), *The Fury of the Huns* by Alphonse de Neuville, reproduced in Guizot's 1870 *Histoire de France* (Fields 2006:58), and, with a pointed tip, in Johann Nepomuk Geiger's *Huns in Battle with the Alans* (1873). Other artists render Huns wearing *spangenhelms*: Raphael's Vatican fresco *The Meeting between Leo the Great and Attila* (1514); Wilhelm von Kaulbach's *Hunnenschlacht (Battle of the Huns, 1837, Neue Pinakothek, Munich)*; *Attila and his Hordes Overrun Italy and the Alps* by Delacroix (1847, Palais Bourbon, Paris); or Ulpiano Checa's *The Huns of Attila* and *The Huns in Rome* (1887). Still other works, like Hans Memling's *Martyrdom of St. Ursula* (1489), depicted on St. Ursula's Shrine (Bruges Memling Museum), represent Huns without either a round cap or a *spangenhelm*.

### **"Huns" in World War I**

Name-calling is an indispensable adjuvant of dehumanization, because killing *Untermenschen* and "Huns" in Europe, "gooks" in Vietnam, or "cockroaches" in Rwanda is easier than exterminating fellow humans:

"All governments try, in the case of war, to awaken among their own people the feeling that the enemy is not human. One does not call him by his proper name, but by a different one, as in the First World War when the Germans were called 'Huns' by the British or 'Boches' by the French" (Fromm 1974:121).

In his essay about Rudyard Kipling, Orwell hypothesizes that Kipling may have been the first to

"let loose the use of the word 'Huns' for Germans; at any rate he began using it as soon as the guns opened fire in 1914" (Orwell 1942).

A pun based on Pasteur's germ theory of disease also circulated during World War I: GermHuns (Wakeford 2001:9). Atrocity stories about the "Huns" fighting on the Western Front reached a peak in 1915, and were still present at the end of the war, albeit not on such a wide scale.

Sternberg & Sternberg's duplex theory of hate may afford a better understanding of the name-calling mechanism and its efficiency.

The negation of intimacy results from the repulsion toward "Huns" indirectly instilled by British war propaganda. Creating emotional, cultural, and physical distance between the British public and a dehumanized enemy that purportedly did not respect "civilized" values such as caring, respect, compassion, etc. presumably made it easier to accept the idea of killing large numbers of Germans. Like the positive intimacy of love, the negation of intimacy tends "to be somewhat slow to develop and somewhat slow to fade" (Sternberg & Sternberg 2008:60) – "slow" if compared to the second component of the triangle of hate. "Racial" closeness between Germans and Brits hardly made room for aversive racism, defined as a feeling of "discomfort" experienced in the presence of the out-group that discourages intimacy (Sternberg & Sternberg 2008:61). The distance drawn between "Huns" and British people in atrocity stories conveniently compensated for the absence of aversive racism.

A bloodthirsty warrior bent on destroying your civilization is guaranteed to inflame the second element of the triangle, passion. Lord Ponsonby's book *Falsehood in Wartime: Propaganda Lies of the First World War* teems with stories about poor little Belgian children whose hands were cut off by the inhuman "Huns", "Belgian women and children refugees who were the victims of Hun rapacity and fiendishness", the "women having had their breasts cut off and the children with their hands backed off at the wrists", crucified prisoners and the like, many of which were exposed as atrocity lies, ten years after the end of the war. Meanwhile, though, they had done their job. Compared to the negation of intimacy, both the emergence and the conclusion of passion are faster. This explains why an enemy-bashing campaign must be periodically revived. But fanning passion is a double-edged sword when the intention is to arouse hatred, because it may trigger either of the two responses to threat – fight or flight. More specifically, one of two divergent emotions may provoke hatred: either anger or fear. Anger will give rise to a fighting attitude, whereas fear will trigger a strategy to avoid the enemy. Therefore, in parallel with the production of atrocity stories, war propaganda must be careful to whip up patriotic feelings and the desire to defend one's family and homeland with bravery and honor, in pursuit of noble aims such as crushing militarism, defending small nationalities, making the world safer for democracy, etc., especially as

“The narrowest patriotism could be made to appear noble, the foulest accusations could be represented as an indignant outburst of humanitarianism, and the meanest and most vindictive aims falsely disguised as idealism. Everything was legitimate which could make the soldiers go on fighting” (Ponsonby 1928).

Elsewhere, Ponsonby writes:

“People must never be allowed to become despondent; so victories must be exaggerated and defeats, if not concealed, at any rate minimized, and the stimulus of indignation, horror, and hatred must be assiduously and continuously pumped into the public mind by means of ‘propaganda’.”

Finally, the commitment element in the triangle of hate leads to the devaluation of the enemy through contempt. Yet again moral values set one group apart from the other: “Huns” endanger the very fabric of civilization through murder, rape, and generally disregard of all moral codes, and therefore deserve to be scorned. As with negation of intimacy, the growth and demise of commitment are slow. In Chapter VIII, Ponsonby reproduces a “patriotic” poem written by a Liverpoolian whose dedication was alive and kicking one decade after the war:

“They stemmed the first mad onrush  
Of the cultured German Hun,  
Who’d outraged every female Belgian  
And maimed every mother’s son.”

Historians agree that Britain was a very proficient disseminator of atrocity propaganda in WWI:

“Tales of the spike-helmeted German ‘Hun’ cutting off the hands of children, boiling corpses to make soap, crucifying prisoners of war, and using priests as clappers in cathedral bells were widely believed by the British public, particularly after the Bryce Commission, which had been established to look into these claims, concluded that many were true” (Cull, Culbert, Welch 2003:23).

The efficacy of Hun propaganda has been verified by countless accounts. As early as February 1915, Ferguson writes, a British trooper notes in his diary:

“We know we are suffering these awful hardships to protect our beloved one’s [sic] at home from the torture and the rape of these German pigs [who] have done some awful deeds in

France and Belgium cutting off childrens hands and cutting off womans breasts awful deeds [sic]" (Ferguson 2006:126).

And in August 1917 an Australian officer empties his revolver on two Germans in a shell hole saying, "This is the only way to treat a Hun. What we enlisted for was to kill Huns, those baby-killing –" (Ferguson 2006:127).

One Major Campbell instructs his recruits:

"If a fat, juicy Hun cries 'Mercy' and speaks of his wife and nine children, give him the point – two inches is enough – and finish him. He is the kind of man to have another nine 'Hate' children if you let him off. So run no risks" (Ferguson 2006:130).

Yet, as shown above, it has been proven without a doubt that many reports about the evil deeds of the "Huns" were fabricated, and Ponsonby's book is a rich source of such false accusations.

A plausible explanation to why people are so easily indoctrinated, indeed brainwashed, both by war propaganda and by peacetime manipulation, comes from research showing that people tend to form stronger stereotypes from second-hand information rather than from their own experience (Thompson, Judd and Park 1999, cited in Sternberg & Sternberg 2008:69).

Atrocity stories may serve a distinct purpose, but are limited in scope. With the experience of two world wars and the Spanish Civil War behind him, as both a writer and, in the latter case, a frontline fighter, Orwell is still impressed when he realizes that atrocity propaganda is only useful to the home side:

"[A]trocities are believed in or disbelieved in solely on grounds of political predilection. Everyone believes in the atrocities of the enemy and disbelieves in those of his own side, without ever bothering to examine the evidence" (Orwell 1943).

The fallout is synthesized in the same article:

"Part of the price we paid for the systematic lying of 1914-17 was the exaggerated pro-German reaction which followed. During the years 1918-33 you were hooted at in left-wing circles if you suggested that Germany bore even a fraction of responsibility for the war" (Orwell 1943).

The harsh verbal treatment of a nation that was rather closely related both ethnically and culturally could not escape the attention of the self-styled defender of human rights and

proponent of a “New Paradigm for Humanity”, David Duke, who, in time-honored Nazi fashion, mixes truth with anti-Semitic stereotypes and false assumptions, to hatch a half-truth:

“The press that was Jewish-owned or Jewish-controlled agitated unashamedly for war, running lurid tales of German atrocities, and promoting stories that Germany planned to invade the United States through Mexico – even though, in four years of war, it had been unable to even take Paris. In short order, the Germans – although racially and morally no different from the British and Americans – were labeled ‘Huns’ and ‘baby-killers.’ The Allies, despite Britain’s and France’s nondemocratic foreign empires, were said to be fighting for ‘democracy.’ Even though Germany had electoral institutions similar to those of the Allies, it was called tyrannical” (Duke 2002:213).

Leaving aside the stale “Jewish press” cliché, Orwell’s aforementioned comment on Kipling, who was not Jewish, and the “four years of war” that bring us to the end of the war, long after the heyday of atrocity stories, the Germans were, after all, the aggressors, and indeed the first to cross a threshold by killing prisoners “in revenge for attacks on civilians” (Ferguson 2006:126). Not to mention that the existence of “similar” institutions is no guarantee of democracy, as Nazi Germany’s Reichstag, the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, or North Korea’s Supreme People’s Assembly have proven more than enough. The sophistry of Duke’s argument is so devious that it manages to turn a truth into a lie.

Even if it was untypically unleashed in a cultured democracy, not in a remote bigoted medieval village or a totalitarian state, like witch-hunting and the Stalinist trials of the 1930s, the German-Huns campaign is a perfect lesson in name-calling as a shortcut to dehumanization.

## **“Huns” in World War II**

Interestingly, in World War II British and German propagandas swapped tones. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had slammed the German and Austrian comic media for misleading their own troops into believing their enemy was weak, causing great harm to their own country, while

“British and American war propaganda was psychologically efficient. By picturing the Germans to their own people as Barbarians and Huns, they were preparing their soldiers for the horrors of war and safeguarding them against illusions” (Hitler 1939:148).

It was the Germans’ turn to switch to atrocity stories as a tool of propaganda previously tested on themselves. Disappointed after finding out that most of WWI anti-German atrocity

stories were fabricated, the British used them on a narrower scale, upgrading instead the humorous side of propaganda.

But Orwell's vigilance was undaunted. In the same article that lays bare the snares of atrocity propaganda, he points to the trap skepticism may fall into, and dissects with accurate lucidity the process whereby, given a chance, appalling figments materialize:

“[U]nfortunately the truth about atrocities is far worse than that they are lied about and made into propaganda. The truth is that they happen. The fact often adduced as a reason for skepticism – that the same horror stories come up in war after war – merely makes it rather more likely that these stories are true. Evidently they are widespread fantasies, and war provides an opportunity of putting them into practice” (Orwell 1943).

A tragic side-effect of the people's loss of trust in atrocity propaganda, many authors agree, is the Allies' belated effort to put an end to the Holocaust (Sternberg & Sternberg 2008:142).

In WWII, “Huns” was part of the war lexicon of both sides, albeit with different meanings. After a decades-long process of naturalization, while still an ethno-cultural slur, the Hun-German association was now all-but a commonsensical assumption (not so for Orwell, though), which British war propaganda, and to a lesser extent the American one, continued to wield against the German enemy.

Churchill employed it extensively. On the other side, Hitler used “Huns” both in the proper sense and as a substitute for Russians. If the British called Germans Huns, and the Germans called Russians Huns, then whom did the Russians call Huns?

Stalin seems to attribute the strongest negative expressive value to “Fascist”, a word with a special resonance for Russians. In ‘What Is Fascism’, Orwell lists all those accused of fascism in his time: conservatives, socialists, communists, Trotskyists, Catholics, war resisters, supporters of the war, nationalists, followed by

“farmers, shopkeepers, Social Credit, corporal punishment, fox-hunting, bull-fighting, the 1922 Committee, the 1941 Committee, Kipling, Gandhi, Chiang Kai-Shek, homosexuality, Priestley's broadcasts, Youth Hostels, astrology, women, dogs and I do not know what else”,

to conclude that, even if by Fascist people “mean, roughly speaking, something cruel, unscrupulous, arrogant, obscurantist, anti-liberal and anti-working-class”, this abuse made the word almost meaningless (Orwell 1944a).

It is true, as early as 1934, Stalin ironically compared the barbaric Germans who destroyed Rome with the ancient Romans, eliciting “thunderous applause” at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, one year after Hitler rose to power, and seven years before his country was itself to be invaded by the “Fascist hordes”, concluding: “What guarantee is there that the claims of the representatives of the ‘superior race’ of today will not lead to the same lamentable results?” (Stalin 1954:302).

Compared to Churchill’s vibrant metaphors, Stalin’s references to his enemy are repetitive, unimaginative, and rather conventional. Although, once the Trotskyist “legend” that labels Stalin as a mediocre apparatchik is refuted, Courtois sees in him a “fanatical realist” and the most important historical figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Courtois 2011:37, 89-90), a flamboyant style was not the forte of the “Brilliant Genius of Humanity”:

“Unlike the other top leaders, Stalin was not an intellectual or theoretician. He spoke a simple and unpretentious language appealing to a party increasingly made up of workers and peasants. His style contrasted sharply with that of his Politburo comrades, whose complicated theories and pompous demeanor won them few friends among the plebeian rank and file” (Getty & Naumov 1999:38).

Quite often he almost deferentially refers to “Germans”, “German troops”, “the German army”. He may occasionally drop a sentence like “the Soviet people have saved the civilization of Europe from the fascist vandals” (Stalin 1944), but his favorites are “German-fascist invaders”, “fascist beasts”, “German enslavers”, “German-fascist hordes” (Stalin 1943). The destruction wrought by the “Hitlerite hordes” was likely to conjure up the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Mongol invasion, the most traumatic event in Russian history, rather than the Huns’ distant notoriety. However, Stalin could not be too explicit about the Mongol threat, because in 1924 Mongolia had become a “people’s republic” and a satellite of the USSR, and in WWII it was the Soviets’ ally against the Japanese.

The Mongol invasion held the same negative expressive value for Hitler, usually in conjunction with the Hunnic invasion. Time and again, he spoke of the danger “the like of which has not imperiled the continent more dreadfully since the times of the Huns and later the Mongolian invasions” (Domarus 1990:2486), “a second Mongolian invasion by a new Genghis Khan” (Domarus 1990:2491), fighting “against this Mongolian state of a second Genghis Khan” “just as against the Huns back then” (Domarus 1990:2507), “a new Mongol invasion” that



“would sweep across Europe” (Domarus 1990:2534) – in 1941; in 1942, “Central Asian barbarism would sweep across Europe as at the time of the invasions by Huns and Mongols” (Domarus 1990:2628), and Europe “has come together here, as in former times against attacks by the Huns or Mongols” (Domarus 1990:2678); in 1943,

“The gravest consequences of this war would then be not only the burned cities and destroyed cultural monuments, but also the bestially murdered multitudes, which would become the victim of this Central Asian flood, just as with the invasions by the Huns and Mongols” (Domarus 1990:2773); in 1944, in a radio speech he said:

“[S]hould the Reich break, then no other state in Europe will be capable of mounting an effective resistance against this new invasion by the Huns” (Domarus 1990:2872);

and on February 24, 1945, his proclamation read:

“As the invasion of the Huns was not repelled with pious wishes and admonitions, as the century-long invasions of our Reich from the southeast were not thwarted by diplomatic artistry, as the Mongol invasion did not stop at the borders of ancient cultures, so this danger cannot be eliminated by right alone, but by the strength which stands behind this right” (Domarus 1990:3016).

On December 11, 1941, four days after the attack at Pearl Harbor, he adopts a messianic tone:

“It was not the Occident that the Romans and the Germanic people defended against the Huns. It was not Germany that the German emperors defended against the Mongols. It was not Spain that the Spanish heroes defended against Africa. Instead, it was Europe that all of them defended. In the same way today, Germany does not fight for itself, but for the continent that belongs to all” (Domarus 1990:2535).

In this speech during which he declared war on the United States, Hitler warned that “A new Mongol invasion would sweep across Europe” (Domarus 1990:2534), and paid homage to some of his allies:

“Had not Slovaks, Hungarians, and Romanians also taken on the defense of this European world, then the Bolshevik hordes, like Attila’s gangs of Huns, would have roared across the Danubian lands and then today Tartars and Mongols would stand at the Ionian Sea” (Domarus 1990:2537).

Yet Attila must have held an ambivalent value for him, since a German operation to occupy southern France in 1940 was codenamed Attila (Domarus 1990:2144).

While his people was equated with Huns, Hitler himself was not compared to their famous leader. As we have seen, Attila's representation in the European collective memory is versatile, whereas the Huns' is decidedly negative. Hitler could not be shown in a better light than Germans, who as a nation deserved to be considered still human and gain salvation. He was doomed and had to be strongly individualized as unparalleled in evil: "Hitler is a monster of wickedness, insatiable in his lust for blood and plunder" (Churchill 1941c). Alternatively, sometimes Churchill preferred to diminish his stature, calling him, for instance, "that bad man" (Churchill 1941b).

Hitler seemed to suffer because of the Hun label applied to his people. In *Mein Kampf* he complains that when a nation (Germany) "has been presented to the public as a horde of 'Huns', 'Robbers', 'Vandals', etc." for years on end, an alliance is impossible with the past enemy (Hitler 1939:475). Although he does mention the "Jewish press" many times in his book, he does not do so in this immediate context. It is David Duke who will finish the job for him eighty years later (see above).

His private conversations are little different from his overblown speeches, e.g. 9-10 October 1941: "We Germans are alone responsible that the tide of Huns, Avars and Magyars was halted in Central Europe" (Trevor-Roper 2000:50); 5-6 January 1942: "If we hadn't seized power in 1933, the wave of the Huns [i.e. Bolsheviks] would have broken over our heads" (Trevor-Roper 2000:182); 9 April 1942:

"It is, for example, perfectly true, but of no importance, to say that had the Romans been defeated by the Huns on the Catalaunian Fields the growth of western culture would have been impossible and the civilisation of the time would have been destroyed – as indeed our own civilization to-day will be destroyed if the Soviets are victorious in this war" (Trevor-Roper 2000:417).

In Churchill's discourse, "Huns" had an unambiguous negative value whereby he positioned Britain as a contemporary Rome defending civilization, itself and its allies, against invading barbarians:

"I expect that the 'Battle of Britain' is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization" (Churchill 1940:687).

The word was a constant of Churchill's war vocabulary throughout WWII, irrespective of context, medium or addressees. The naturalization of the meaning was over so, unlike in WWI, a narrative of the "Hun's" atrocities was no longer needed, although now the atrocities were as real as they were unprecedented. As explanations were assumed to be superfluous, "Huns" routinely replaced "Germans":

"If they [the Greeks] were resolved to face the might and fury of the Huns, we had no choice but that we should share their ordeal" (Churchill 1941a:438);

"[The people of Yugoslavia] were struck down by the ruthless and highly mechanized Hun";

"There are less than 70,000,000 malignant Huns, some of whom are curable and others killable, most of whom are already engaged in holding down Austrians, Czechs, Poles and the many other ancient races they now bully and pillage" (Churchill 1941b);

"the Royal Air Force beat the Hun raiders out of the daylight air raid"; "the dull, drilled, docile brutish masses of the Hun soldiery, plodding on like a swarm of crawling locusts"; "Hun fighting machines" (Churchill 1941c); "we have made the Hun feel the sharp edge of those tools with which he has enslaved Europe" (Churchill 1941d); "the rescue of France from the horrible oppression of the Huns" (Churchill 1944); etc.

At the same time, he was cautious not to underestimate his enemy, which, besides being untrue, would have diminished his country's and his own position. Caution called for the appropriate exonym: "the German tiger", "I have never underrated the German as a warrior" (Churchill 1941b); "the German hammer" (Churchill 1941c); "we owe a great debt to blunders – extraordinary blunders – of the Germans", "mighty Germany" (Churchill 1944); etc.

The constant commonsensical assumption of British war propaganda and Churchill's discourse was: the enemy is a barbarian, and a very powerful one. But in August 1944, when Orwell was reflecting on the difference between dehumanizing your enemy and merely killing him, the Allies had recently landed in Normandy and the tides of war had turned against the Germans:

"Apropos of saturation bombing, a correspondent who disagreed with me very strongly added that he was by no means a pacifist. He recognized, he said, that 'the Hun had got to be beaten'. He merely objected to the barbarous methods that we are now using. Now, it seems to

me that you do less harm by dropping bombs on people than by calling them ‘Huns’” (Orwell 1944b).

For him, bombing, shooting and generally killing one’s enemy, normally expected in war, is common sense. War may be absurd, but its ineluctable laws are the expression of the fundamental instinct of survival, hence natural. In sharp contrast, affixing a derogatory label, hating, or telling lies about your enemy is not only unnecessary but, according to Orwell, an attack on humanity itself.

So it may be, but the efficiency of name-calling and atrocity stories is beyond doubt. As a consequence, one of the hardest dilemmas facing a nation at war is: do we want to win, or do we want to remain decent and truthful?

### **The rehumanized enemy**

The Huns vanished from history soon after Attila’s death, the threat of Mongol invasion subsided with the rise of the Ottoman Empire, and after the new “Huns” were defeated at the heaviest price of all, a combination of factors has dramatically altered the uniformization-dehumanization-extermination paradigm in the West. The fall of the colonial empires in the wake of WWII led to the emergence of the state of Israel and post-colonial independent Arab states, radically changing political relations and the balance of power at the gates of Europe.

The new generic foe is no longer an armed Hun or Mongol, but the descendant of another past enemy, Saracens: an armed Arab (alternatively, Iranian, Pakistani, or Afghan). At the same time, since a modern, professional army does not rely on conscription, it needs less mass support, hence less propaganda on the “civilian front”. As a consequence, finding disparaging names for the enemy is no longer a priority. Atrocity propaganda is still used with some effectiveness (in August 2013, reports that the Syrian regime used nerve gas against the opposition, killing hundreds of civilians in the process, sparked the decision of the US and UK to consider military action), but the speed and ubiquity of present-day media, which anyone is able to utilize in real time, prevents hearsay from becoming credible as it did in the past.

In situations of war and combat, the new barbarian enemy may be defined as one who does not observe the internationally accepted rules of engagement and the Geneva Convention: individuals or rogue states that commit murder against civilians and/or non-combatants. Also, a

common-sense assumption about one who “favours or uses terror-inspiring methods of governing or of coercing government or community” (Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English 1975), or makes “systematic use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective” (merriam-webster.com 2013), unlike one who is merely “engaged in warfare” (both Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English 1975 & merriam-webster.com 2013), is to name the former “terrorist” and the latter “militant”, like the mentioned dictionaries do. Moreover, since some modern “militants” are not violent at all, naming people who kill other people simply “militants” is wont to draw outrage from victims of terror. But as media across the world serve different ideologies supported by different meaning systems, the same event will predictably bear different stamps.

When rockets are fired from Gaza at Israel, the situational context is completely different on the two sides. Since the rockets are indiscriminately launched into civilian areas, the Israeli media speak of “Gaza terrorists”: ‘Gaza terrorists fire two rockets at Tel Aviv’ (*Jerusalem Post* staff & Lappin 2012). On the same day, 16 November 2012, but on the other side, Dr. Akram Habeeb is happy and proud that Palestinians have made tremendous progress in developing rockets to “deter the oppressor, and the aggressor”:

“Today, for example, the *resistance* [my italics], succeeded to reach deep parts inside the occupied Palestine. The Palestinian homemade rockets succeed to reach Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem” (Habeeb 2012).

Al-Jazeera sees that ‘Missiles pound Gaza neighbourhoods’, though it concedes, rather vaguely, “the firing of long-range missiles by a *Palestinian group* [my italics] at major Israeli cities Tel-Aviv and Yaffa” (Joudeh 2012). The ambiguous attribution of the attack may be due to a cautious approach on the various often conflicting groups and interests in Gaza. Surprisingly, Ma’an News, self-described as “the largest independent TV, radio and online media group in the West Bank and Gaza Strip”, titles rather placidly: ‘ Hamas says fired rocket at Tel Aviv’, naming the attackers simply “Gaza militants”. It is true, the credits for this piece of news go to Reuters.

So far, so natural. But when it comes to supposedly neutral observers, one must expect the unexpected. The same unassuming “Gaza militants” are reported by *The Independent*, who all but shifts the blame onto the innocent victims: ‘Gaza militants’ missiles target Tel Aviv in *revenge* [my italics] attack’ (Kalman 2012). *The New York Times* attributes the launches to “more radicalized Palestinians” (Bronner 2012); *Le Monde* (2012) speaks of “the armed branch

of Hamas” (“*la branche armée du Hamas*”); *El Periódico de Catalunya* (Massagué 2012) does not even name the agents, but only the place where the rockets come from (“*ataques con cohetes contra Israel desde Gaza*”); and the list can expand indefinitely.

Terrorists? The resistance? Militants? Armed branch? Or just “a group”?

“Terrorist”, the only designation that does not confer legitimacy, carries such a heavy negative expressive value that Reuters shuns it in “an attempt to avoid characterizing the subjects of the news rather than reporting their actions or background” (Herbst 2003:166). Using or not using this word in an article may be perceived as synonymous with the difference between writing an opinion article and writing a news report. In the same entry on terrorism, Herbst admits that the term has “hundreds of academic, official, and popular definitions”, which reflect the complexity of the phenomenon. Whatever the case, discourse producers give the word “terrorist” a negative expressive value: with few exceptions who accepted the appellation, “I” and “we” are never terrorists (but militants, insurgents, freedom fighters, guerillas, etc.); only others are. Even so, its widespread overuse is exposing it to the fate of the word “Fascist” in the 1940s.

In parallel, the hyper-politically-correct transition from the negative “terrorists” to “militants” or similar neutral designations, seen day by day in the international media, is an ideological naturalization the result of which is humanization of terrorism. An entity that attacks and kills civilians at random is being given equal rights and treatment. Would Orwell’s defense of Christian and humanitarian values, extended to the “Huns”, have covered present-day “militants” too? The question will hang in the air forever.

Long after the 1683 siege of Vienna, the last Muslim invasion of Europe, as peaceful economic migration has superseded military incursions, Muslims and Christians continue to be suspicious of each other. Needless to say, radical Islamists have their own vision and version of barbarism, *jahiliyyah*, the savagery and ignorance of the pre-Islamic period in which those who have not embraced Islam are living. An asymmetrical mutual perception is operating: radical Islamists adamantly judge Westerners as corrupt and decadent, positioning themselves against different types (the impure other, the enemy of God, the morally bankrupt), whereas Westerners generally view radical Islamists as barbarians bent on destroying civilization through bloody terrorist attacks and infiltration of Western society, ignoring the silent Muslim majority.

At the same time, in contrast with the ruthless, protracted war being fought by their states against terrorists in various regions of the world, significant segments of the Western media have politically-corrected the designation of the enemy, carving a rift between real war, which is as bloody as ever, and a sanitized representation of the enemy in the Western mindset. To what extent this new representation will backfire in the politics of Western countries remains another open question.

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