

Dancing around the Savage¹

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We know the answer that Frazer was supposed to have given to William James, when he was asked whether he had met any natives. Frazer responded, not hiding his astonishment, “But God forbid!”. But the very same Frazer devoted many volumes to the “savage” he had never set his eyes on!²

Popular thinking of users of each culture sometimes includes unwarranted, premature generalisations of individual experiences, by no means representative but seen as representative, i.e. legitimate and genuine. Stereotype treated as a research category becomes a term describing this phenomenon and, at the same time, a term introducing some order into thinking about popular thinking. As a result, when we use it, we usually focus on what is popularly perceived and verbalised, but at the same time we put up a blockade in our thinking about those levels of culture that are still not subject to stereotyping. Stereotypes seemingly facilitate reaching an agreement and intercultural communication, but at the same time justify our distancing from asking non-standard questions and make it possible to disregard opinions that do not conform to popular experience – even when this popular experience touches upon a specific form of scientific discourse. We could say that if abstract notions stem from generalisations of concrete, similar phenomena of the phenomenal order, stereotypes emerge from generalisations of cogni-

¹ The main arguments of this article were presented during the conference *Stereotypes from the perspective of the humanities and social sciences*, organised in Warsaw under the Inter-University Programme of Interdisciplinary Doctoral Studies of the “Artes Liberales” Academy between 16 and 17 January 2012.

² A. Waligórski, *Antropologiczna koncepcja człowieka*, Warsaw 1973, p. 153. Ibidem source of the anecdote: R. Benedict, “Anthropology and the Humanities”, *American Anthropologist* 50, 1948, issue 4.

tive phenomena, to which Walter Lippman ascribed the status of images³. Such an image or picture created in the human mind may become a tool for unifying supraindividual experiences and convictions, and, as a result, the foundation of collective attitudes. It can also become the basis of interpretation, provided that it assumes a form accessible to a potential interpreter – e.g. verbal form. In this form – as popular and easily reproducible opinions – stereotypes popularise convictions about ideas, people, objects and behaviour. If Lippmann's "pictures" are by definition unavailable to researchers, their linguistic picture, i.e. second-generation picture, becomes the basis for shaping our knowledge about simplified ways of human thinking. For in the process of multi-level translation of impressions into pictures, pictures into words, words into notions, etc. we often reduce, generalise and distort, which affects the final research outcomes.

This may be of particular importance in the case of the so-called ethnic stereotypes, formally divided into autostereotypes (positive and negative opinions about one's own group), heterostereotypes (occasionally changing opinions about another group) and vereotypes (balanced, descriptive judgements, avoiding extremes, judgements that, according to Mario Abate and F. Kenneth Berrien, result from a researcher's confrontation between autostereotypes and heterostereotypes)⁴. Since the publication of Lippmann's classic study, there have been many others, inspired by these categories. It seems, however, that their popularity paradoxically contributes more to the strengthening of simplified judgements than to their correcting through research results. This is probably because reconstructed and copied examples of simplified thinking often seem more attractive than effects of verification of common beliefs. True, not all Frenchmen eat frogs, which we traditionally do not eat, but it is so much easier, simpler and, to some extent, wittier to call somebody a "Frog" than to think about the consequence of the patronising distance that allows us to forget, if only for a moment, about the internationally famous achievements of French cuisine.

If we assume that the familiar-alien principle generates simplified ideas about ethnic groups, then we should take a closer look at the category that could be treated as metageneralisation, which emerges when the feeling of familiarity is shifted to the level of a supranational community, built on the basis of religious beliefs and civilisational achievements. The savage-civilised opposition, for it is what I am discussing here, was verbalised fairly late, but the consequences which

³ See W. Lippman, *Public Opinion*, New York 1922.

⁴ See K. Kwaśniewski, "Stereotyp etniczny", [in:] *Słownik etnologiczny. Terminy ogólne*, ed. Z. Staszczak, Warszawa-Poznań 1987, p. 327. See also J.S. Bystron, "Megalomania narodowa", [w:] idem, *Tematy, które mi odradzano. Pisma etnograficzne rozproszone*, Warsaw 1980; A. Niewiara, *Wyobrażenia o narodach w pamiętnikach i dziennikach z XVI–XIX wieku*, Katowice 2000; eadem, *Moskvicin — Moskal — Rosjanin w dokumentach prywatnych, Portret*, Łódź 2006; eadem, *Kształty polskiej tożsamości. Potoczny dyskurs narodowy w perspektywie etnolingwistycznej*, Katowice 2010, p. 421.

are still felt deserve some attention. All the more so that “civilised” in this context is a synonym of “Europeanness”, while “savage” – of a significant part of what is non-European. A juxtaposition of these terms suggests at the same time a need for reflection on the extraordinary affinity between the myth and the stereotype.

Myth is among the tried and tested tools for shaping human consciousness. Therefore, whenever there is a need to rhetorically support a thesis which has its own more or less distinctive alternative, it always happens that we invoke the common values constituting myth and choose its specific version. In such situation myth is to be an argument determining the veracity of the chosen option and this belief in its persuasive power prompts me to cite, in the context of these reflections, one of the numerous versions of the tale of the Mediterranean sources of our continent’s culture. After all, Europe was the name of a Sidonian princess abducted by Zeus, whom the god, having transformed himself into a bull, took to Crete.

The myth of Europe contains a theme of deification⁵. The theme is all the more significant given the fact that it signals some special qualities of Zeus’ chosen one, extraordinariness stemming not only from her enchanting beauty and fertility (after all, she was to bear several children), but also from some vague traits of her character which made Zeus remain under her spell for a long time, generously giving her remarkable gifts. Gods’ gifts are never random⁶. Thus Europe received a miraculous spear never missing its mark, a perfect weapon facilitating expansion; a dog which never let any prey escape it – a kind of axiological model promoting uncompromising rapacity and justifying a culture of spoils; and the bronze giant, Talos, a mysterious guardian preventing strangers from getting into the island which the god chose as a place of abode for his beloved. The metal giant, moving on its own thanks to some unknown vital energy, serving just one function – protecting the island from strangers – on the one hand is a symbol of

⁵ See P. Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* [1951], Wiley-Blackwell 1996, Polish translation by A. Nikliborc, ed. J. Łanowski, Wrocław 1987. We can read there (p. 93), for example, that Europe is a name of several mythological figures. The “most celebrated figure of this name was the daughter of Agenor and Telephassa, beloved of Zeus [...]. Zeus saw Europa when she was playing with her companions on the beach at Sidon or Tyre, where her father was king. Filled with love for her, he transformed himself into a bull of a dazzling whiteness, with horns like a crescent moon, and lay down at Europa’s feet. After she had overcome her initial fright, Europa sat upon the bull’s back, caressing the animal. The bull immediately made for the sea and plunged into the waves. Despite Europa’s cries, the bull swam away from the shore and both reached Crete, where at Gortyna, beside a spring, Zeus lay with Europa beneath some plane trees; in memory of this divine love the trees never lose their leaves”.

⁶ “Europa gave Zeus three sons: Minos, Sarpedon and Rhadamanthys. She is also said to have given birth to Carnus, Apollo’s lover, and also Dodon. Zeus gave her three gifts: the bronze ‘automaton’ Talos (Argonauts), which guarded the shores of Crete against any alien invasions; a dog which never let any pray escape it; and a hunting-spear which never missed its mark. He then married her to Asterius, the king of Crete and son of Tectamus. Childless, Asterius adopted Zeus’ children. After her death, Europa received divine honours” (Ibidem, pp. 93–94).

xenophobia, and on the other, heralds the fascination with technology that with time became synonymous with our civilisation. This work of Hephaestus or Dedalus, a god or a man, both of whom had extraordinary inventions to their credit, was to testify to the admiration people had, already in Antiquity, for mechanical toys imitating not mechanical but living creatures. It is a trace of an extraordinary project, dating back to the Bronze Age, which even when treated as a phantasm does not cease to amaze and encourages reflection⁷.

Without embarking on a too far-fetched interpretation, we can assume that Europe's origin is non-European (Sidon or Tyre, her alleged homeland, now lies in Lebanon, i.e. south-western Asia). We can conclude from all the versions known today that according to the myth it was Crete that was the first to adapt values acquired from somewhere else, values which, in conditions of relative isolation, made up the foundation for successive generations to build the unique nature of Mediterranean civilisation. Significantly, however, that specific nature had at its roots a very distinctive icon of xenophobia and, at the same time, axiological models – embodied in an animal and an object – that have survived to this day. When in 1997 Noam Chomsky gave one of his most controversial books the title of *Year 501. The Conquest Continues*⁸, in practice he illustrated a characteristic European syndrome of the dog which never lets its prey escape. This history of various faces of colonialism begins with a chapter titled with a quote: “The Great Work of Subjugation and Conquest” and, with the initial subchapter, also a quote, as well significant in its title “The Savage injustice of the Europeans”. Having at their disposal more and more perfect spears which never miss their mark, Europe's

⁷ Cf. “Talos. A figure of Cretean myth, sometimes said to be a human being and sometimes a bronze robot. In the first case he is the son of Cres, the eponymous hero of the island, with the god of fire, Hephaestus, being his own – Talos’ – son. Hephaestus, in turn, is said to have been the father of Rhadamanthys. In another version, Talos’ father was Oenopion. In the second case, Talos was regarded as a work of either Hephaestus, who had given it to Minos, or Dedalus, the royal court artist, or a representative of the ‘Bronze Race’ on earth. Generally, Talos is a guardian of Crete. Indefatigably vigilant, he was chosen for this service by Minos or by Zeus, who entrusted to him the care of the island of his beloved Europa. Everyday he would walk around Crete three times, wearing full armour. Not only did he prevent strangers from invading it, but also prevented the inhabitants from leaving the island without Minos’ permission. That is why Dedalus may have chosen the air route to escape him. Talos’ favourite weapons were huge boulders he would throw very far. Even when they managed to overcome this first barrier, ‘secret strangers’ had to fear another danger from Talos. When Talos captured them, he would jump into the fire, heat up his metal body until it became red-hot, rapturously embraced the wretched ones to burn them in his arms.

Talos’ body could not be wounded except for the lower part of his leg, where he had a vein covered by a small bone. When the Argonauts came, Medea was able, thanks to her magic, to open this vein and Talos died. According to another account, Poeas, Philoctetes’ father and one of the Argonauts, pierced the vein with his arrow. Talos was also said to be the father of Leucus (– Idomeneus)”, “Talos”, Polish translation by B. Górka, [entry in:] *ibidem*, pp. 332–333.

⁸ See N. Chomsky, *Year 501. The Conquest Continues*, South End Press 1999, Polish translation by Z. Jankowski, O. Mainka, Warsaw-Poznań 1999.

children, conceived in rape and sure of their impunity, not only remain faithful to the ancient motto “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”, or “let violence hurl back violence”, but also, at least since Alexander’s times, they have been efficiently looking for a pretext to confront their own powers and resources with a real or imaginary enemy. It is usually not an enemy that would threaten their territory, as for example, Genghis Khan’s army; rather, it is an enemy that must be overpowered before he can even start thinking about threatening the only true civilisation.

The myth of the metal giant guarding us against an invasion by strangers is our initial myth, and the set: the giant, the spear and the dog provides mythologised arguments legitimising growing Eurocentrism. Seeking valuable spoils (the type of which changes from period to period), we travel across vast territories, each time coming across the right enemy or faithful ally. However, winning over allies is usually a tiresome task of little economic effectiveness, unlike defeating enemies.

The imperative of defence against strangers is just the beginning. Talos hurled rocks at ships that tried to reach the shores of Crete. With time European elites have come to the conclusion that the defence of entire civilisation, religion or interests of various states was obvious. This required going beyond the borders of the continent, transgressing towards territories where a potential threat could arise. The fear of being attacked made us look around nervously. A need to defuse the numerous internal tensions that had built up in Europe for over two-thousand years, prompted many of its inhabitants to leave their continent and sail towards the horizon. Looking for gold and spices, looking for new lands and unknown riches, we found the savage. And we revealed to the world our own “savage injustice”, which we treated as the “right of the white man”.

Various, though usually triumphal dances of “the civilised” around “the savage” begin in the era of great geographical discoveries. The very term carries with it clear Eurocentric connotations: beyond our world, well-known and tamed, described and researched, there are some enclaves demanding to be discovered and investigated and, first of all, conquered. These enclaves, inhabited by the natives – we do not quite know whether they are truly humans, but even if they are, they are worse than us – became a challenge to adventurers, impoverished knights, missionaries, researchers, troublemakers, merchants and thieves. Lost in a maze of crisscrossing interests and intentions, they began together to seek impressions, well-known and unknown but easily accessible goods, to seek prestige, fame and higher social standing. They killed in the name of rulers, who never even set foot in the conquered lands, they forcibly baptised in the name of the merciful and just God, they plundered convinced that power is a sufficient argument for taking property, freedom and life from the weaker. Achieving their short-term goals, each time they triumphed partially, confirmed in their conviction that their chosen path was right. They were accompanied by fear of the other, fascination with hunting the savage, fear of the power of nature and prospects of an unexpected revenge on

the part of the native inhabitants of the conquered lands. That is why each seized stronghold was treated as a synonym of success, as a stage on their way to conquer the unknown, as a victory over the enemy. They developed many simple forms of conduct in the conquered lands, they set an algorithm of colonising actions and rules for respecting the “rights of the white man”.

Struggles with barbarians, with inhabitants of unknown territories, creatures speaking an incomprehensible language, having strange customs and worshipping strange gods, had been a phenomenon known in Europe since time immemorial. However, the concept of “the savage” is fairly recent. If the ancients sought to conquer new territories and absorb new peoples into the existing organisational systems, in the modern era people who were to a large extent descendants of those who had come here during the Migration Period began to need strangers less and less as science and technology developed: the existing infrastructure was not able to absorb the entire human potential, it was satisfied with territories and riches. The locals who did not display any obvious talent for adaptation were a problem: they had to be fed, clothed and guarded; even baptism did not guarantee an automatic change of old habits. So they were readily pronounced savage, unruly and wilful, used to living close to nature, just like animals.

It might seem that the old methods aimed at physical destruction of the savages are denounced today. Yet, as Jared Diamond notes, it is not obvious or, at least, not common:

Today, the attitudes of white Australians towards their murderous past vary widely. While government policy and many whites’ private views have become increasingly sympathetic to the Aborigines, other whites deny responsibility for genocide. For instance, in 1982 one of Australia’s leading news magazines, *The Bulletin*, published a letter by a lady named Patricia Cobern, who denied indignantly that white settlers had exterminated the Tasmanians. In fact, wrote Ms. Cobern, the settlers were peace-loving and of high moral character, while Tasmanians were treacherous, murderous, warlike, filthy, gluttonous, vermin-infested and disfigured by syphilis. Moreover, they took poor care of their infants, never bathed and had repulsive marriage customs. They died out because of all those poor health practices, plus a death wish and lack of religious beliefs. It was just a coincidence that, after thousands of years of existence, they happened to die out during a conflict with the settlers. The only massacres were of settlers by Tasmanians, not vice versa. Besides, the settlers only armed themselves in self-defence, were unfamiliar with guns, and never shot more than forty-one Tasmanians at a time⁹.

The righteous indignation with which the Australian lady rejected the thought of immoral conduct of their own ancestors and her uncompromising defence of their honour of course have their source in the still living convictions that the European civilisation model is superior. In this respect, contacts with strangers were an unfortunate necessity, they put Europeans at risk of coexisting alongside creatures that made the life of emigrants even more difficult, as they had to make

⁹ J. Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal*, Harper Perennial 2006, p. 283.

the traumatic decision to leave their homeland or had even been forced to leave it¹⁰. Creatures encountered on the other side of the globe resembled animals, but they posed a much greater danger – initially they beguiled with an illusion of understanding, then they rebelled against the obvious and commonly recognised rules and finally dared to attack the newcomers, who displayed a kind of helplessness in relations with the indigenous peoples living in the colonised territories. Although at least since the Neolithic Era people had taken care of domesticated animals, provided they had got rid of inconvenient instincts, there still perfectly functioned an imperative, well-motivated by the need to survive, to hunt wild animals and even systematically eradicate them, if they posed a real or potential danger to humans. With time hunting became a ritual emphasising mainly individual courage and valour as well as cunning, ingenuity and inventiveness in laying snares for especially valuable or dangerous creatures. People living in newly conquered territories would quickly fall victim to the passion for laying snares by the strangers, who had come from nobody knew where and nobody knew what for. The locals were verbally signed as savages and treated as savages – the more they defended their independence, the more they were persecuted. Cornered, they lost freedom or life in an unequal fight and the newcomers did not spare them the sight of victory dances. They quickly baptised, forced the locals to work like slaves, they disgraced, shamed and used various ways to demonstrate their own superiority, if not physical then at least moral. Of significance was also intertribal and sometimes international competition – the uninvited guests began a strange race to be the first when it came to the vastness of the conquered territories, amount of spoils and number of converted souls. Colonising became part of the ethos of Europeans, leaving them with not much choice: either you will conquer yourself or you will fall victim to the conquerors.

In Polish tradition we have the story of the killing of St. Adalbert by the pagan Baltic Prussians. We know it in two oldest versions: one popularised by Gallus Anonymus¹¹ and one depicted on the Gniezno Doors¹².

¹⁰ E. Kosowska, E. Jaworski, "Wielka Narracja emigracji", [in:] *Česká a polská emigrační literatura*, ed. L. Martinek, M. Tichý, Opava 2002 (reprinted in: *Śląsk* 2002, no. 1 (75), pp. 59–61).

¹¹ "He [Boleslaus] too, when St. Adalbert came to him, having suffered a lot of harm in his long wandering and [previously] from his own rebellious Bohemian people – received him with great respect and faithfully followed his advice and orders. The holy martyr, burning with the flame of love and a desire to preach faith, when he noticed that faith in Poland had spread somewhat and the holy Church had grown, went to Prussia without any fear and there in martyrdom ended his profession. Later, Boleslaus bought his body from the Prussians, paying its weight in gold, and placed [it] with due veneration in the metropolitan seat of Gniezno." Gallus Anonymus, *Chronica Polonorum*, R. Grodecki, Wrocław 1982, pp. 18–19. On the other hand, *Historia Polonica* by Master Vincentius (so-called Kadłubek) lacks details about St. Adalbert's martyrdom. In it, Adalbert is referred to, in accordance with his status at the time, as blessed and regarded as Boleslaus the Brave's role model.

¹² One of the most interesting examples of Romanesque art, made in ca 1170.



Murder of St. Adalbert. Fragment of the bas-relief on the Gniezno Doors, photo: Agencja BE&W

The former is a very restrained account of full respect shown to the bishop by the ruler of the newly baptised land of the Polans, of his acceptance of how Christianity was spread in Boleslaus' state, of his failed attempt, ending in his death, to spread the mission to Pomerania, and of the buying out of Adalbert's body from the Prussians. The latter is full of details, the most drastic of which is probably the depiction of how the bishop was killed. The bas-relief depicts Adalbert kneeling, pushed to the ground by a warrior's foot. The murderer holds him by the hair with his left hand, while his right hand holds an axe with which he will soon decapitate his victim. Another warrior uses his spear to hold Adalbert's body in a position that facilitates execution. The otherwise little known way in which the executioner uses his own leg to stabilise his helpless victim makes the scene even more horrific. However, it certainly does not depict the Prussian warrior as a savage: he is a "barbarian", still not baptised, a pagan, half-naked but with shoes on his feet, whose customs cause fear and terror. But these customs, characterised through differences from the rules of behaviour followed in civilised countries, are part of a long tradition of descriptions of otherness, known from Herodotus, through Plutarch to Isidore of Seville and other medieval chroniclers, fascinated by people without heads, without lips, without one eye, with big ears, living among trees growing "together with the sun". The popularity of various stories about stran-

gers, disseminated in medieval encyclopaedias, popular Alexander romances and oral tales, equipped the explorers from the great discoveries period with a set of ideas about potential encounters with unknown creatures. Usually, they expected nothing good from them and projected their own fears and fantasies onto them.

I have reasons to believe that each European language developed a slightly different convention of identifying and describing strangeness and that the so-called savagery became the object of a special kind of semantic abuses. The latter term assumed the function of a collective notion of sorts, replacing several others and, at the same time, eliminating the need to distinguish between more and less clear shades of meaning accompanying the component terms. Such a functional simplification was conducive to the term in question being treated as a verbal stereotype, which in turn projected collective ideas and reactions focused on an imagined designatum. Ethnic stereotypes have long been the focus of various interests. But the various ideas surrounding “the savage” go beyond ethnic borders; they become, so to speak, an anthropological stereotype, indicating a clearer separation not only between “us” and “them”, but also between humans and non-humans. I will not delve into various consequences of such ontological projects. Instead, I will focus briefly on the characteristic semantic content of the expressions that constitute the semantic field of “savagery” in Polish¹³.

In Andrzej Dąbrowka and Ewa Geller’s *Dictionary* the term “savage” has seven antonyms: “quiet”, “civilised”, “licensed”, “gentle”, “tame”, “trustful”, “technicised”. Two of them can be regarded as relatively new, but “quiet”, “civilised”, “gentle”, “tame” and “trustful” have a long tradition; on the one hand, they provide a key to describe behaviour situated on the opposite extreme of “savagery”, and on the other – they constitute a model of the “good savage” popular in progressive European thinking at least since the Renaissance. On the other hand, “savagery” in the dictionary-based meaning of the term is juxtaposed with “sanity” or “boldness”, and “savage” – with “gentleman” and “soul of the party”. In addition, the authors mention “wild West” as an antonym of “legal norms”. These conclusions are not yet of any special interest with regard to anthropological reflections; we could even say that this is a quintessence of a popular stereotype. However, if we start an analytical dance around such a thesaurus, we can, drawing on the same source, slowly approach the essence of the matter.

Let us consider the following: if the “savages”, in accordance with their nature, do not want to be “quiet” and non-aggressive, i.e. “agreeable”, “non-combative” / “gentle”, “quiet” / “composed”/poised, they immediately become “loud”, “crude”, “excitable”, “grumpy”, “aggressive”, “uncontrollable”, “harsh”, “megalomaniac”, “frenzied”, “raging”. If they refuse to become “civilised”, they remain “uneducated” and “barbaric”. If by any chance they are not “gentle”, they immedi-

¹³ I am using here materials included in: A. Dąbrowka, E. Geller, *Słownik antonimów. 64 000 znaczeń przeciwstawnych i uzupełniających języka polskiego*, Warsaw 1995.

ately turn “raw”, “ruthless”, “relentless”, “incurable”, “aggressive”, “unbridled”, “rough”, “indecent”, “malevolent”, “violent”, “stern”, “tough”, “bloody”, “merciless” and sometimes also “desperate”. If they are not “tame”, they must be “timid”, if they are not “trustful”, they become “devious”, “grouchy”, “distrustful”. And when they lack “boldness”, they are full of “shyness”, “mistrust”, “cowardice”, “timidity”, “awkwardness”, “reluctance” and even “whingeing”. When they are not “gentlemen”, they turn into “boors”, they become “uncouth”, “unfeeling” and “callous”; when they cannot be the “life and soul of the party” (and they cannot by definition), they become “stuffy” or, at best, “introvert”. If they lack understanding, they tend to be “strict”, “belligerent”, “reproachful”, “ruthless”, “orthodox”, “relentless”, “principled”. If they do not respect legal norms, they spread “lawlessness” and, consequently – and here I am following the Word thesaurus – they accept “disorder”, “chaos”, “vacuum”, “diarchy”, “anarchy”, “nihilism”, “misrule”, “disarray”, “confusion” and “violence”.

We can thus look condescendingly at Patricia Cobern’s arguments, but in our own vocabulary there are plenty of terms which justify the triumphal dance of death around the savage, ending in extermination and consequently, perhaps, a sigh of relief.

We also have very efficient linguistic tools to create the myth of the “good savage”, who does not suffer from ADHD, who is quiet, peaceful, is not an inconvenience to anyone. Such individuals are much more desirable as neighbours than those who are prone to the wildest possible insubordination. “Good savages” are “good-natured”, “kind”, “sympathetic”, somewhat “frivolous”; “care-free”, “flamboyant”, “gentle”, sometimes “cunning”, but usually “warm”, “nice”, “agreeable”, “non-combative”, “gentle”; “quiet”, “poised” and at the same time “active”, “passionate”, “sensitive”, “forgiving”, “understanding”, “friendly”, in other words – “humane”.

With such a linguistic picture of the world, we can quite easily turn a word into a spear which never misses its mark. With it, we can deal a deadly blow to an opponent and/or give him an aura of heroic legend. We can place him on the side of nature and spread fear of his strength and unpredictability; we can see him as a member of an ideal, model community¹⁴, we can view him as an inhabitant of a paradise lost. Treating every “savage” we encounter on our way, in a conversation or reflection, as a symbol of our various fears or hopes, we can also regard him as a *pars pro toto*, as an embodiment in a specific human being of the concept of savageness, close to us since the late Middle Ages, a concept through which we judge his individual qualities and predispositions.

Nearly all of us try to dance our individual dances, more or less coherently, around the savage. We move to the tune of pious chants and we set out on reli-

¹⁴ See A. Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion* [2005], Polish translation by T. Siczkowski, A. Dąbrowska, Kraków 2009.

gious missions. We travel in search of exoticism or at least we try to follow the exotic escapades of various explorers. We take part in war dances and we march into someone else's territories. We drag "them" into our interests, beguiling them with lively tunes and the clang of money. We deprive them of peace, humming our *dumkas* and lullabies. Finally, when we have dragged them into the dancing circle of colonial discourse, luring them with a possibility of regaining lost innocence and identity by means of languages that have never been their languages, we condescend to let them join the somnambulant dance to the death knell for destroyed cultures.

The figure of "us" is by no means obvious, for it conceals a stereotype of identity based on desired values, on a willingness to be on the right side in this dance of culture with nature, on bows to the victors, on spinning round the leaders and having others who lead span round us. Descendants of the erstwhile founders of the Maritime and Colonial League enthusiastically learn the language of the colonisers today, because only fluency in that language can save them from the status of "savages". The concept of "savageness" has become a status concept in Europe today, a notion especially susceptible to stereotyping and dragged into the enchanted circle of constant hierarchy building. Today its function has been distinctively taken over by the antonym – people who lack a sense of political correctness are those who use the term "savage", especially with reference to strangers. But it is acceptable to talk unscrupulously about oneself as being "civilised". Intoxicated by the vision of a common dance called globalisation, we seek various ways out of the backwoods in which history has placed us and we try to join others in the circle. At the same time, we are consistently building a new, transcontinental Talos who is to save us from designs of the "savages" and we try not to remember (or, indeed, remember) the dozens of little Taloses at the disposal of both our present partners and other *épouseurs* just waiting to be invited to join the circle. The ball during which we are whirling and whirling directed by banks and the media is to some extent a masked ball. When we reveal our faces at midnight, it may turn out who is the latest generation "savage" and who only had a "savage" as a partner.

