An Inquiry into the Roots of the Modern Concept of Development

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Abstract

Development policy rests on the conceptual division of the world between developed and underdeveloped countries. The article argues that this dichotomous way of splitting the world into one collective self, on one side, and a collective other, on the other, pertains to the category of what Koselleck has termed "asymmetrical counterconcepts." Moreover, many of the characteristics of our modern concept of development directly derive from older counterconcepts or dichotomizations e.g. the idea that the underdeveloped can, in principle, "develop" and that developed countries should assist others in developing themselves. In this essay some historical examples of such dichotomies are examined, with a special emphasis on the civilized-uncivilized conceptual pair and on the idea of civilizing the "Barbarian." The recapitulation of past dichotomies not only unearths the historical influences on the idea of development. Above all, it contributes to a better understanding of its present-day complexities.

1. Introduction

To a large extent, the current notion of development was shaped by the longstanding tradition of conceiving the world through dichotomous concepts. This tradition has expressed itself repeatedly through the use of cat-

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egories that divide the world in two halves: on one side, the group one belongs to, on the other side, the group that encompasses everyone else.

Noteworthy examples of such historical dichotomies are the conceptual pairs Hellene-Barbarian, Christian-Pagan and Human-Subhuman, all of which have been analyzed by Reinhart Koselleck, who coined the expression "asymmetric counterconcept" to characterize the specific semantic structure of such conceptual dyads. Starting from his framework and expanding on it, this article explores the close links between historical asymmetric counterconcepts and the notion of development.

"Development" is a relatively recent global policy goal. It evolved in the period following World War II as a novel form of interaction between sovereign states, based on new theoretical foundations (development economics) and guided by international institutions, many of them exclusively created to foster its cause (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations, etc.). This being so, it does not come as a surprise that the historical foundations of the concept of development are seldom the subject of analysis.

It is often said that development means different things to different people. The variety of different meanings has caused some authors to claim that "development defies definition... because of the difficulty in making *the intent to develop* consistent with *immanent development*."[1] In this article, development refers to the attempt to "develop" the "underdeveloped". I will show that both the rhetoric of official development assistance as well as older conceptual dichotomizations presuppose that the external intent to develop (i.e. aid or assistance in the widest sense) will lead to internal processes of "immanent development" in the underdeveloped countries. Consequently, the two aspects of development which are seen as separate in the quote above are in fact combined. They are not the same, but sequentially connected – one is supposed to lead to the other.

Additionally, the word development hides an interesting peculiarity. Development is the "process or fact of developing" and at the same time "the concrete result of this process."[2] The analysis of past dichotomies will also show that this characteristic is not an exclusive trait of the concept of development. In fact, it was already characteristic of the concept of civilization.

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[1] Michael Cowen and Robert W. Shenton (1996), 438 – emphasis added.

[2] *Oxford English Dictionary* (1985), two-volume edition, 707.

Usually, the word "underdeveloped" is omitted from modern official development discourse in favor of less offensive terminology (such as "developing" etc.). However, I refer to it to underline the "exclusive" character of the developed-underdeveloped dichotomy in which being underdeveloped is, by definition, the contrary to being developed. Therefore, the concept of underdevelopment is a constitutive element of "development" and still lingers behind diplomatic euphemisms. In order to decipher the semantics of development, one needs to look also at the the concept of underdevelopment.

My hypothesis is that past conceptual dichotomies (or asymmetric counterconcepts) have not only shaped the concept of development in terms of the opposition developed-underdeveloped but also that many other major characteristics of the semantics of development derive from them. To name a few: the notion that the underdeveloped can develop, that development is a process as well as a stage, that a conceptual distinction is made between the intent to develop and immanent development, that development assistance is an obligation for the developed, that, ideally, the path of development is laid out for all underdeveloped countries alike, and that no final stage of development can ever be reached. The historical analysis of past asymmetric counterconcepts is aimed at identifying the constituents of our present-day concept of development and leads to a better understanding of its complexities. Thus, rather than analyzing the history of development policy as such, this article traces the genesis of the specific mindset which is responsible for the way in which we almost intuitively perceive the contemporary concept of development.

The article is divided into three parts. First, I will identify the place that the characteristics identified above occupy within the rhetoric of development policy. At this point, a disclaimer is necessary. Despite focusing on rhetoric, I will not dwell in detail on the hidden political power issues that have shaped development assistance strategies. In the second part I will analyze some key historical asymmetric counterconcepts, focusing specially on the dichotomy civilized-uncivilized with its idea of civilizing the "Barbarian," which had a strong influence on the notion of development. Finally, the resonance of past counterconceptualizations in the idea of development will be made clear.

2. The Notion of Development According to Policy Rhetoric

In contrast to the several and sometimes contradictory ideas that in policy documents determine which specific development strategy to implement, many cited characteristic features of the discourse on development have remained unchanged over time.

Arguably, the "age of development"[3] began in 1949 when the American president Harry S. Truman, in his inaugural speech of January 20, called for a concerted global effort to develop what he called "underdeveloped areas." It is only from that moment on that development policy became a truly *global* endeavor in which the world was divided into two groups of countries or regions, the developed and the underdeveloped.

Truman was not the first to use the word "underdeveloped." Cowen and Shenton have discovered the first "modern" usage of the word "develop" in nineteenth-century Great Britain,[4] albeit in a theological context. Arndt[5] has also shown that the idea of "developing underdeveloped areas" had already entered the rhetoric of British colonial administration some time before Truman's speech.

Yet, in my view, the use of the words by the American president Truman was different and novel in that he split the entire globe into two halves: those that needed aid and the others, who were able to provide it. He no longer limited development exclusively to the colonies from a colonizer's viewpoint. Moreover, "Truman's program of international 'fair dealing' helped produce an unprecedented explosion of international institutions, professions, organizations, and disciplines whose raison d'être was the lodestar of development"[6] and which led to a global "professionalization and institutionalization of development."[7]

In the famous passage of his speech that referred to development, Truman said:

> We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and

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[3] Wolfgang Sachs (1991).

[4] Michael Cowen and Robert W. Shenton (1995) and Michael Cowen and Robert W. Shenton (1996), 7.

[5] Heinz Wolfgang Arndt (1981).

[6] Michael Watts (1995), 55.

[7] Arturo Escobar (1988), 430.

growth of *underdeveloped areas*. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people. . . . I believe *that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life*. And, in cooperation with other nations we should foster capital investment in areas needing development. Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, *through their own efforts*, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens. . . . It must be a world-wide effort for the achievement of peace, plenty, and freedom.[8]

He then went on to state that "only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people."[9]

The historical context in which the speech was given is that of containment – the preeminent American foreign policy of the Cold War. Yet, the speech laid out many of the characteristics of development that are still valid today. Firstly, that the world is divided into developed and underdeveloped (counterconceptualization). Secondly, that the underdeveloped can be developed through adequate assistance by the developed nations, which should make their "benefits of scientific advances" as well as their financial resources available to them. Thirdly, that underdeveloped countries should "participate in growing abundance," since the "human family" has, according to Truman, the right to live a "decent, satisfying life." Thus, development policy is normative. There exists an imperative for the developed world to develop the underdeveloped in order to overcome the existing dichotomy of the world. Fourthly, as the goal of development interventions must be "helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves," and since successful development will be reached "through their own efforts," the seed of successful development must lie within the underdeveloped countries themselves, the process of development only has to be activated (which means that immanent development follows the intent to develop through assistance).

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[8] Italics added.
[9] Harry S. Truman (1949).

The dichotomization of the world into developed and underdeveloped areas introduced by Truman remained operative through the following decades, sometimes expressed through more or less euphemistic synonyms, such as the North-South nomenclature, which dominated the development discourse until way into the 1980s. But even if theories and varying political leanings differed in the role and obligations they ascribed to the advanced countries, it was always clear that the developed countries had some kind of responsibility in fostering the development of the underdeveloped and that the underdeveloped too should be enabled to reap the fruits of progress. These arguments still persist as some recent examples show.

In 1990, for instance, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) introduced the concept of "human development." In it, development was defined as "a process of enlarging people's choices."[10] UNDP proposed that developing countries should adopt policies that foster human development (i.e. more investment in health and education etc.) instead of focusing predominantly on economic development. This was one of the most radical paradigm shifts in development policy ever. But even if human development was to be pursued primarily by policy measures undertaken by the developing countries themselves, "donors," that is, the developed world and the international development institutions had to play an important role in providing external finance and technical guidance to countries of the developing world that were viewed as unable to shoulder these efforts by themselves.[11] In this, the human development paradigm still rests on the developed-underdeveloped dichotomy epitomized by Truman. However, the concept of development used by UNDP is noteworthy for another reason. Within it, development is explicitly defined as a dynamic process, a gradual transformation. Although this rhetoric of gradual change had already been implicit in the older development rhetoric, it has become more obvious through the advent of the human development paradigm, especially through UNDP's Human Development Index.

In its 1990 *Human Development Report*, UNDP proposed a measurement according to which human development could be quantified: the Human Development Index (HDI), which focused on three "essential elements of human life – longevity, knowledge and decent living standards."[12]

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[10] United Nations (1990).

[11] United Nations (1990), 80.

[12] United Nations (1990), 12.

Since then, UNDP has published a yearly ranking of countries according to their HDI. It currently includes 177 countries.[13] In 2005, the first twenty ranks of high human development were held by "typical" developed countries, with the developing countries following far behind. Since yearly changes in rank of individual countries are extensively commented by the press, the ranking mirrors the prevailing perception of development being a gradual process, one, in which the countries, albeit ideally, should follow an upward path through various different stages of development until reaching similar positions as those currently held by the developed world.

When looking at the absolute value for a specific country, another important aspect of the HDI, which is made up of a composite value of three indicators (per capita income, literacy and life expectancy), becomes clear – even those countries with a high level of human development can still improve the indicators used in the index, especially per capita income which – in principle – can grow infinitely. Thus, even at the stage of high human development, further progress is always possible. This then entails that there is no final stage of development which has been or can be reached. Rather, development is the process of approximating an ever higher stage of development, without ever fully reaching it.

In September 2000, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the *United Nations Millennium Declaration*. Adopting a wording very similar to Truman's, it stated that "we will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want. . . . We resolve therefore to create an environment . . . – at the national and global levels alike – which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty."[14]

The Millennium Declaration defined a set of eight specific Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that were to be reached globally by the year 2015. Since their declaration, the MDGs have had a lasting influence on global development cooperation. The activities of different UN institutions including the World Bank as well as national governments and large non-governmental organizations currently revolve around the issue of how

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[13] United Nations (2005).
[14] United Nations (2000).

to meet the MDGs. Two major reports concerning the MDGs were published in 2005, ten years before the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals. One is the "*Sachs-Report*" of the UN Millennium Project, and the other one is the 2005 *Human Development Report* by UNDP.

In the preface to his report, Jeffrey Sachs writes that in order to end extreme poverty "the World community has at its disposal the proven technologies, policies, financial resources"[15] and that these should be made available by the developed countries. In his recommendations on how the goals could be reached he added that "high-income countries should increase official development assistance" and that donor countries should scale up their "technical support."[16] The report also quotes the managing director of the IMF as having said that in order to reach the goals "the heaviest responsibility [of attaining the MDGs] inevitably must fall on the advanced economies."[17] UNDP's *Human Development Report* of the same year highlights explicitly "what governments in rich countries can do" so that the Millennium Development Goals are reached[18] and calls for "a renewed commitment to cooperation."

Both reports highlight the current development rhetoric. They share the belief that the developed world not only possesses the necessary financial means, but also the required technology to help the underdeveloped rest of the world to overcome their burden. Thus, the development of the underdeveloped is possible – ideas that closely reflect the speech Truman delivered more than fifty years earlier. In conclusion, it is possible to speak of the existence of a broad "notion" of development that is made up of recurrent elements. These are, as will be shown, embedded in and a result of the tradition of understanding the world through asymmetric counterconcepts.

3. Historical Dichotomizations

According to Koselleck,[19] asymmetric counterconcepts (*asymmetrische Gegenbegriffe*) are the denominations that one group or society devises to

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[15] Jeffrey Sachs (2005), xi.

[16] Jeffrey Sachs (2005), 193.

[17] Jeffrey Sachs (2005), 197.

[18] United Nations (2005), 2.

[19] Reinhart Koselleck (1989).

describe itself and, at the same time, all others around it as well. These terms are "asymmetric" because those devising the concepts unilaterally label the others. And since the definition of the other is done in opposition to the perceived qualities of the collective self, both terms are mutually exclusive; they are counterconcepts. Asymmetric counterconcepts usually tend to encompass the entire human race, that is, they are binary conceptual formations of universal value.[20]

Koselleck analyzes three such counterconceptual pairs: Hellenes and Barbarians, Christians and Pagans, and Human and Subhuman (*Übermensch und Untermensch*).

In order to accomplish my goal of revealing the genealogy of the developed-underdeveloped conceptual opposition, it is necessary to briefly summarize the arguments set forth by Koselleck before developing them toward the analysis of yet another counterconceptual pair, that of "civilized-uncivilized," and by connecting all these dichotomies to the concept of development.

Asymmetric counterconcepts are, of course, far from being the only possible representation of the "other."[21] Yet, it is this framework that best lends itself to the task of unearthing the roots of the modern concept of development, as I intend to show in the following sections.

(a) *Hellenes and Barbarians*

The distinction Hellenes-Barbarians evolved between the sixth and the fourth century B.C. From the point of view of the Hellenes, it served to separate all known peoples into Hellenes and Non-Hellenes – with the Non-Hellenes being generally referred to as Barbarians. The term Barbarian carried with it a negative connotation. It stemmed from the unfavorable image that was made of foreign peoples in contemporary Greek art and philosophy. It was based on the experience acquired with other nations in commerce and trade, through slavery, through wars against foreign powers such as the Persians, and through the contact between the Greek colonists and the Scythians on the shores of the Black Sea. The dichotomy was devised by Athenian intellectuals, above all playwrights such as Aeschylus and Euripides who "constructed a single barbarian world, squeezing

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[20] Reinhart Koselleck (1989), 213.
[21] See François Hartog (1980) and (1995).

peoples as distinct as Scythian nomads and Mesopotamian city-dwellers into a single new species, and opposed it to the image of a single and united Hellenic world."[22]

Hellene culture was viewed as being far superior to all others, hence the negative connotation of the term Barbarian. The word "Barbarian" is believed to be onomatopoetic. It poked fun at those speaking incomprehensible languages that sounded as mere blah-blah to sophisticated Greek ears. As such, the term denominated all foreigners.

Koselleck highlights that Hellenic authors such as Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle had at some point weakened the strict dualism initially created by the concept of Hellene-Barbarian by comparing the apparent differences in cultural, economic and political development between the Hellenes and Barbarians of their own times to a distant past when Hellenes and Barbarians lived not only on the same low developmental level but had also shared the unpolished manners which were still the characteristic of later-day Barbarians. For these authors, it was a certain process of development that helped establish the manners and institutions that came to distinguish the Hellenes from the rest of the world.

Hellenes and Barbarians thus departed from the same starting point. Yet, the two groups subsequently experienced completely different developments. This helped establish the view that the contemporary superior position of the Hellenes had been the result of a process of improvement over time. Although this argument served to underpin the perceived Hellene superiority, I would point out that in terms of our idea of development it primarily introduced an element of mobility into an otherwise static dichotomy. Apparently, change to the better was possible. Yet, according to the Greek authors, it was only the Hellenes who were fortunate or diligent enough to have experienced progress. They neither envisaged that the Barbarians could have undergone the same progress as the Hellenes, nor were they of the opinion that the Hellenes had some kind of responsibility to transform the Barbarians or to help them reach the same level of well-being and development.

With time, especially through the ascent of the Roman Empire, the position of the Hellenes as the sole people at the highest stage of development was challenged. The concept of Hellenes was broadened. It now

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[22] Neal Ascherson (1996), 61. See also Edith Hall (1989).

encompassed all knowledgeable and developed societies, which at the time almost exclusively meant the Romans.[23]

The terms Hellene and Barbarian were mutually exclusive as well as culturally and geographically incompatible. One could simply not be a Hellene and a Barbarian at the same time. Although the others, i.e. the Barbarians, were denominated in a derogatory manner, Koselleck holds that the historic achievement and innovation of this asymmetric counter-concept is to have at least identified the others and given them a name. Yet I would hold that another achievement consisted in becoming aware of the possibility of progress, of improving over time, even if development was exclusive and merely reserved to the Hellenes. However, as the Greek sense of time was circular, the notion of progress cannot be entirely linked to the idea of unlimited progress of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In this circular view of history, progress was feasible. But it always included the possibility of falling back into tyranny or decadence.

(b)   *Christians and Pagans*

With the rise of Christianity, a new denomination for "the others" was introduced: "Pagan." The Christian–Pagan dichotomy superseded the universal dualism of Hellene/Roman-Barbarian. One reason why the Christians surpassed the old dualism was that with Christianity spreading all over the Mediterranean Basin, Christians were to be found on both sides of the prior cultural and political divides. This being so, Christians themselves needed their own definition of the others around them.

The Christian-Pagan counterconcept overcame the dominantly spatial dimension of the Hellene-Barbarian dichotomy, i.e. the view that all peoples outside of Greece were Barbarians. At the same time, it gave up the inflexibility that denied the Barbarians the possibility to develop, that is, to graduate out of the stage of Barbarism. The new dichotomy implied the possibility of Pagans turning into Christians, of a future Christianization of the Pagans, the gradual merging of the latter into the former. The Hellene-Barbarian dichotomy had limited progress and change exclusively to the Hellenes. It saw the Barbarians as statically fixed in their inferior stage of development. By definition, it was not possible that a Barbarian, with time, could turn into a Hellene. The possible metamorphosis of the

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[23] Yves Dauge (1981).

other into oneself is a completely innovative aspect of the Christian-Pagan dichotomy.

This also had to do with the inclusive character of the Christian religion. The gospel addressed the whole humanity, not solely Christians. According to Christian belief, the teachings of Christ were of universal value to everyone. In economic terms, Christianity was a public, non-exclusive good. Therefore, anyone who wished to participate in the new creed could become a member. Whereas Hellenes and Barbarians might have departed from the same historical starting point, the two groups were viewed as completely exclusive and separate. The Christian-Pagan dichotomy, however, lacked this idea of mutual incompatibility. Instead, the dichotomy described two stages of development within the same group: humanity. One group had accepted Christ as their Savior while the other had not. There was an important temporal element built into the semantics of this dichotomy. It was envisaged that with time, the others too would come to accept Christianity. Every human being was a potential Christian. It was a metamorphosis of one into the other, or better, of the other into the conceptualizing self, which would later be reflected in the idea that the "underdeveloped" can become "developed."

(c) *Human and Subhuman*

The first two pairs of asymmetric counterconcepts included some form of progression, be it for oneself or for the other as well. The example of human-subhuman is different in that it concentrates on the conceptual exclusion of the other from all humanity, without any possibility of change. One of the reasons why the concept of humanity became frequently employed from the early modern period onward was that, due to the Reformation, Christians could no longer be perceived as a homogenous group. The concept of humanity thus took the form of a common denominator that integrated all conflicting Christian parties.

"Humanity" became something like a counterconcept to Christianity. It referred to all humans, freed from the straitjacket of religious and – in the eyes of the Enlightenment's *philosophes* – other irrational and unjust grips, for which feudal lords or kings were held responsible. Absolutism meant that the king was, if not God-sent, then at least God-like.[24] The concept of

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[24] Reinhart Koselleck (1989), 252.

humanity brought a deliberate ungodliness with it. With the concept of humanity, all humans were in principle virtuous and rational beings. Any institution, religion or force that prevented humans from utilizing their reason and virtue was to be regarded as an enemy of all humankind. The enemy of humanity, that is, anyone opposed to the ideals of humanity, for example a tyrannical king who justified his reign by religion and recurrence to God, was consequently an enemy to be fought.

The counterconcept to humanity thus included anyone who was perceived to be an enemy of whatever definition of humanity was applied. Eventually, this concept came to the extremes within totalitarian regimes in which groups of people, existing both domestically and abroad, were declared to be outside of humanity, and thus, its natural enemies, for instance the *Untermenschen* or subhumans of the Nazi ideology. The concept of the *Untermensch*, who was no longer part of humanity, made it possible to call for the annihilation or physical destruction of the "subhumans" for the sake of humanity.[25]

The concept of humanity also plays an important role in the rhetoric of development. Truman utilizes the word "the human family" as well as the concept of humanity in his speech when he highlights that "humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people." Choosing his words, he denounces living in a state of underdevelopment as inhuman. In his speech, Truman reflects the Enlightenment's notion that everything that jeopardizes humanity has to be overcome. Given that underdevelopment defines a status outside humanity, it is the responsibility of all humanity to end it.

(d) *Civilized and Uncivilized*

The concept of Barbarian proved to be extremely durable. It survived various centuries and resurfaced prominently in connection with the rise of the concept of civilization. Even today Barbarian is still commonly contrasted with the word civilization. To be a Barbarian is, by definition, to be uncivilized. But where does the concept of civilization come from? A notion of what is understood by civilization and civilized life had to be in

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[25] Reinhart Koselleck (1989), 253 writes: "…*daß heterogene Kategorien so konfrontiert wurden, daß es möglich wurde, mit der Negation des – scheinbaren – Gegenbegriffs die Annihilation des jeweils gemeinten Gegners zu betreiben.*"

place when the notion of Barbarian with its negative connotation appeared for the first time.

As Norbert Elias[26] argued, civilization entailed a change in manners. It was a process in which the individual learned to control his or her passions.[27] This self-control was the result of a set of codes of conduct and political enforcement mechanisms underlining the state's monopoly of violence. It severely punished any unauthorized violent behavior. The "self-controlled" civilized individual was defined in sharp contrast with the Barbarian, with his or her unpolished and violent manners.[28] For Elias, civilization is a process, not a fixed trait. It is something that evolves and develops over time.

In the Grimm dictionary of the German language, civilization is defined as the totality of material and socio-ethical values, the possession of which places the cultured societies above the stage of barbarism.[29] In this case, a German term for development (*Entwickeltheit*) is used to describe this status of a higher standard of living, which was viewed as characteristic of civilization.[30]

The term civilization itself was coined in France and appeared in the middle of the eighteenth century. It derived from the Latin *civilis*, civil, and the French *civiliser*, meaning "to polish," to pass from the natural stage to a socially, culturally and intellectually superior stage. The transformation of the word into the noun "civilization" through the addition of the

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[26) Norbert Elias (1969).

[27) Norbert Elias (1969) uses the German term "*Affektkontrolle*".

[28) Several authors distinguish savages from Barbarians. "*Pendant tout le XVIIe siècle, les auteurs français classent les peuples selon une hiérarchie à la fois assez vague et fort déterminée. Au plus bas degré, les sauvages. Un peu plus haut, mais sans qu'il y ait de distinction bien précisée entre les deux espèces, les barbares.*" Translation: "During the entire seventeenth century, French authors classified peoples according to a rather vague yet highly rigid hierarchy. At the lowest level, there were the savages. A little above, albeit without a precise distinction among the two species, there were the Barbarians." Febvre (1930), 10. Adam Ferguson (1767), for example, holds that savages are not acquainted with the concept of property, whereas Barbarians are (1767: 124). However, the concept of civilization is universal and applicable, in principle, to both groups.

[29) "*Die Gesamtheit materieller und sozialethischer werte, durch deren Besitz die lebensform der kulturvölker sich über die stufe der barbarei erhebt.*" Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm (1960), column 1731.

[30) "*Entwickeltheit der materiellen lebensweise.*" See Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm (1960).

suffix "– ation" was characteristic for the neologisms of the French eighteenth century and denominated an act or a process. It quickly became one of the key terms of the French and European Enlightenment. It was used for the first time in Victor de Mirabeau's *L'ami des hommes ou traité de la population* from 1756[31] in which he also speaks of the "*cercle naturel de la barbarie à la décadence par la civilization.*"[32] Interestingly, this still presupposes a circular notion of time and also lacks the ideal of limitless progress which was to materialize only decades later.

Civilization described the process through which one became civilized as well as the result of this process, i.e. the state of being civilized or *civilisé*. In this, the concept of civilization bears a clear resemblance to the term "development." Again, it was the physiocrat Mirabeau who gave the first documented definition of the term in this static as well as dynamic sense in his *L'ami des femmes ou traité de la civilisation* from 1768, which the Grimm dictionary quotes in the following manner: "*la civilisation d'un peuple est l'adoucissement de ses moeurs, l'urbanité, la politesse et les connaissances répandues de manière que les bienséances y soient observées et y tiennent lieu de lois de détails.*"[33] The word "*l'adoucissement*" refers to a process whereas the term "*connaissances répandues*" signifies the result of this process. Naturally, this combination of process and result multiplied the significance that the concept had in contrast to its antonym, barbarism.[34]

Historically, the traits of civilization such as the polishing of manners and other rather behavioral issues were derived from the manners and the etiquette of the French court of the Ancien Régime. Words like *civilize*, *cultivé*, or *poli*, which describe the behavior of the civilized, had, of course, been in use earlier at the court. Just as the latter meaning of the world civilization was coined to distinguish the civilized from the Barbarians, the same words were used by the aristocrats to distinguish themselves from the others, the non-aristocrats. With the development of the concept of civilization, the imagery was left intact. Yet, the "other" was transformed from the non-noble to the Barbarian.

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[31] Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm (1960), column 1731.

[32] Jörg Fisch (1992), 717.

[33] "The civilization of a people is the tempering of its mores, it is urbanity, politeness, and knowledge that is spread such that manners are observed and become a law applied to details."

[34] Jean Starobinski (1983), 18.

Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) intended to provide a theory of how nations ascend to a state in which manners are adequately polished so that they can be considered as civilized or enlightened, i.e. "civil societies." Ferguson described how becoming a civil society is traced out in the blueprint of any nation. He writes: "Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood, but the species itself from rudeness to civilisation"[35] so that "rude nations" turn into "polished nations."[36] He divided the historical course of humanity into four subsequent stages: the savages, the nomads, sedentary farmers, and nations with a high degree of commerce and industry. This view indicated that in principle all peoples of the world would civilize in time. Civilization was thus the path that all societies would take. The path was unilinear and nobody was to be excluded from it. However, the process of civilization as envisaged by Ferguson, came as an unintended consequence of social action, circumstance and conflict. It was not the result of deliberate action or design.[37] And like Mirabeau, Ferguson also disregarded the possibility of unlimited progress. In part five of his *Essay*, which is entitled: "On the Decline of Nations," he writes: "that the progress of societies to what we call the heights of national greatness is not more natural than their return to weakness and obscurity is necessary and unavoidable."[38]

In the early nineteenth century, the view of a natural path of civilization was prominent in François Guizot's *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* (1828) in which civilization was also described as the general destiny of

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[35] Adam Ferguson (1767), 2. The use of the word civil society is quite different from the way in which the term is used today. In Ferguson's sense, it just meant civilized society. Ironically, though, since the Physiocrats believed that the role of a civilized government was to limit itself to establishing effective rules of the game without undue interference, Ferguson's usage of the term "civil society" meant something closer to today's term "good governance" than to today's "civil society," which denominates the sphere between government and the market, i.e. non-governmental organizations etc.

[36] Karl Marx famously wrote in his introduction to *Das Kapital* that developed countries acted as a mirror for the "less developed," showing them their future. It is noteworthy that Marx not only utilises the word "developed," but also "less developed." He presupposes an automatic transformation over time from the stage of being less developed into "more developed." The original reads: "*Das industriell entwickeltere Land zeigt dem minder entwikkelten nur das Bild der eigenen Zukunft.*" See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1977), 12.

[37] Jean Starobinski (1983), 18.

[38] Adam Ferguson (1767), 319.

humanity. Guizot made the direct link between civilization, progress and development, when he wrote that "*L'idée du progrès, du développement, me paraît être l'idée fondamentale continue sous le mot de civilisation.*"[39]

For Guizot, civilization was, first and foremost, a historical "fact."[40] And he wrote: "*pour mon compte, je suis convaincu qu'il y a en effet une destinée générale de l'humanité… et, par conséquent, une histoire universelle de la civilisation à écrire.*"[41] Guizot divides civilisation into two different elements which were to occur simultonously "*le perfectionnement de la vie civile, le développement de la société proprement dite*" as well as "*le développement de la vie individuelle, de la vie intérieure, le développement de l'homme lui-même, de ses facultés, de ses sentiments, de ses idées.*"[42] This gave Guizot a theoretical framework with which to comment on the state of progress of differing European civilizations only to conclude that the stage of civilization in France was by far the most developed. Guizot thus established the notion of various existing parallel civilizations.[43] However, he still adhered to the universal idea of one general course of civilization through which all nations would follow.

The interpretation of the history of humankind, and civilization, as a set of universal stages through which all societies had to pass was also a prominent feature of the idea of unlimited progress that developed a few decades before Guizot. In his 1793 tract, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, Condorcet traced out ten different evolutionary stages during the process of civilization and showed that the reign of reason and liberty stood at the end of this evolutionary ladder. For him, the process of civilization, i.e. progress, was all about the "*perfectionnement de l'espèce humain.*" He also argued that the tenth and final evolutionary stage of progress had not yet been reached and was reserved for a distant future.

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[39] "The idea of progress and development seems to be the fundamental idea contained in the word civilization." François Guizot (1856 [1828]), 15 – emphasis from the original.

[40] Lucien Febvre (1930), 33.

[41] "To my knowledge, I am convinced that there certainly is a general human destiny, and, consequently, there is a universal history of civilization to be written." Lucien Febvre (1930), 35.

[42] "The perfecting of civil life, the development of society itself" as well as "the development of individual life, of interior life, the development of man himself, of his faculties, sentiments, and ideas." Jörg Fisch (1992), 753.

[43] This is what Pim den Boer (2006), 56 has described as the "conceptual nationalization" of the concept of civilization.

The Baron d'Holbach had argued in a similar vein twenty years earlier, when he wrote in his *Système Social* : *La civilisation des Peuples n'est pas encore terminée*.[44] Thus, even the civilized could always progress further, civilization was an endless progress. The notion of progress had finally become linear.

But Condorcet also held that due to their superiority, the more civilized nations should help the others to become like them, when he wrote: "*Mais l'instant approche sans doute où… nous deviendrons pour eux des instruments utiles, ou de généreux libérateurs*."[45] Civilizing was an obligation for the civilized.

The inclusive and universal nature of the concept of civilization meant that anybody, be it a nation or a single individual, could carry the seed of civilization inside and the more civilized had to see that all obstacles for this seed to flourish were removed.[46] This idea of an unfolding of inherent traits, itself the original meaning of developing (from the French *desvelopper* = unfold), was characteristic of the age of Enlightenment. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* aptly exemplifies this attitude. After having begun to civilize "his man Friday," Robinson observes:

> However it had pleas'd God, in His Providence, and in the Government of the Works of His Hands, to take from so great a Part of the World of His Creatures, the best uses to which their Faculties, and the Powers of their Souls are adapted; yet that he has bestow'd upon them the same Powers, the same Reason, the same Affections, the same Sentiments of Kindness and Obligation, the same Passions and Resentments of Wrongs, the same Sense of Gratitude, Sincerity, Fidelity, and all the Capacities of doing Good, and receiving Good that he has given to us; and that when he pleases to offer them Occasions of exerting these, they are as ready, nay, more ready, to apply them to the right Uses for which they were bestow'd, than we are.[47]

The civilized-uncivilized dichotomy notably differed from the Christian-Pagan-dichotomy. Within the older dichotomy, the change from one side

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[44] Paul-Henri Thiery d'Holbach (1994 [1773]), 562.

[45] "But doubtless the moment will arrive in which we will become for them useful instruments or generous liberators." Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat Condorcet (1988 [1795]), 268.

[46] Historically, civilization firstly referred to society as a whole before it was perceived as an individual trait. See Jörg Fisch (1992), 735.

[47] Daniel Defoe (1998 [1719]), 209.

to the other was radical and all-encompassing. Once baptized, a pagan fully converted to Christianity. There existed, in principle, no differentiations within the two exclusive groups. A Christian was a Christian and a Pagan was a Pagan. One could, through conversion, fully and instantly become the other. There were no different stages through which the other has to pass in order to become the self. Whereas the older counterconcepts were based on binary extremes of black and white, the idea of civilization, through its conceptualization as a process, introduced and identified differing shades of grey. Since civilization was a never-ending process, various degrees of civilization could be envisaged, as was done by authors like Ferguson and Condorcet. A Barbarian could not become "civilized" from one day to the other but had to pass through various rites of passage, just like children had to be educated over a long period of time before, as adults, they were deemed "civilized" or better "polished" and "enlightened" enough.[48] In Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the narrator, after contemplating the peculiar way in which the "savage" but assimilated harpooner Queequeg puts on his boots, exclaims: "Queequeg, do you see, was a creature in the transition state – neither caterpillar nor butterfly. He was just enough civilized to show off his outlandishness in the strangest possible manner. His education was not yet completed. He was an undergraduate."[49] Here, the education analogy implies that outside assistance is needed in the process of civilization. It does not come by itself.

Hence, civilizing children and Barbarians was in essence one and the same thing, as Starobinski writes: "*le barbare est une sorte d'enfant, l'enfant est une sorte de barbare*" … "*qu'un bienveillant et patient polissage rendra semblables à nous.*"[50] In fact, this notion has a historic precedent. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish crown asked the representatives of the School of Salamanca to come up with a legal and moral justification for the way in which the *conquistadores* made use of the indigenous population

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[48] The historical concept of civilization being both the process and the result of a process of civilizing differs considerably from the concept of civilization that is used by authors like Samuel Huntington (1996), who sees civilization as a cultural entity. Whereas he models the world as consisting of various and contrasting civilizations, the historical concept allows for only one model of civilization, but differing degrees and stages of being civilised.

[49] Herman Melville (2003), 31.

[50] "The Barbarian is like a child, the child is like a Barbarian … a good-willing and patient polishing will make them similar to us." Jean Starobinski (1983), 27.

they encountered in the New World. The scholars answered that the Indian was part of the human family, but like a child in need of education.[51]

Over time, the term civilization gradually lost its uncritical positive connotation. The *terreur* of the French Revolution, the atrocities committed in the colonies of Africa and Asia by Europeans in the name of civilization, as well as a general critical attitude towards the idea of unlimited social and technological progress, to name but a few examples, all contributed to blur the old dichotomy as the civilized frequently showed elements of savagery and barbarism themselves.[52] In its extreme form, the different positions of the dichotomy were even reversed. Montaigne and Rousseau, for instance, had conceptualized the "noble savage" as unspoiled and thus more polished than his self-proclaimed civilized brother. Yet, the traditional ideas of civilizing and of civilization never completely lost their appeal.

(e) *From Civilization to Development*

The extent to which the concept of civilization has influenced the modern development parlance can be seen in a quote from a recent *Least Developed Countries Report* that is published yearly by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Speaking of the appalling living conditions in an African village, the report states that this situation should be considered "an ethical affront to a civilized world."[53] The quote mirrors several of the characteristics of the notion of development. It supposes that there is a civilized world – and that at the same time, envisaged through the description of the standard of living in the African village, there exists another world that does not live up to the standards of civilization due to its underdevelopment. Not the entire world is thus on the same level of development. There exists the other, inferior, underdeveloped, uncivilized world. The use of the word "ethical affront" once again suggests that the developed world, the civilized, have an ethical responsibility to change this situation. This clearly shows the resemblances of the interventionist stance of both the rhetoric of civilization and development as well as various characteristics of the older asymmetric counterconcepts.

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[51] François Hartog (2005), 39.
[52] Jean Starobinski (1983).
[53] United Nations (2004), I.

4. Conclusion: Lessons from Dichotomization for Development

The developed-underdeveloped dichotomy is itself an asymmetric counterconceptual pair. It was exclusively coined by one group, in this case the "developed" world. Following the general rule of Koselleck's counterconcepts, the terms developed and underdeveloped are mutually exclusive. What is more, the analysis of historical dichotomizations has shown that the various traits of the modern notion of development have already been characteristic of past asymmetric counterconcepts. The possibility of progress, of improvement over time, which is the main trait underlying the idea of development, has been articulated in the Hellene-Barbarian dichotomy – even if in that case, progress had been limited exclusively to the Hellenes. Another trait of development, namely that the ultimate goal is to overcome underdevelopment altogether and that the underdeveloped should at least ideally become developed has been a characteristic of the Christian-Pagan dichotomy, in which the asymmetric counterconcept foresaw that one group should in time be converted into the other. It introduced the idea of metamorphosis and of overcoming the dichotomy. The human-subhuman dichotomy in which everything deemed "inhuman" or a threat to humanity was to be fought, further mirrors the development rhetoric which states that underdevelopment is basically a disgrace to humanity and should be overcome with all means possible, especially through a further commitment to aid and assistance.

But mostly, the concept of development reflects the civilized-uncivilized dichotomy. Both concepts, civilization and development, denominate at the same time the process of civilizing/developing and the stage of being developed/civilized. No final level of either development or civilization can ever be reached because even the most developed and civilized countries can progress further. Just as civilization, development is a normative concept. To transform from an uncivilized/underdeveloped to a civilized/developed stage is the overarching ideal path that every society and every country should follow. Additionally, those who are already more civilized/developed have the responsibility to assist the less civilized/developed in attaining the same level of progress as them. It is generally assumed that the uncivilized/underdeveloped have the capacity to civilize/develop once they have been assisted. The uncivilized/underdeveloped are believed to carry the seed of progress folded up within them, waiting to be unfolded.

Thus, immanent civilization/development follows the externally assisted attempt to civilize/develop.

At this point it is useful to briefly return to the current usage of the word "developing," a term that has now practically replaced "underdeveloped" in the parlance of international agencies, academia and diplomacy. The term developing is interesting in that it presupposes a movement towards a satisfactory level of development whereas the notion of "underdeveloped" is static and does not imply progress or motion. The word "developing" is thus a semantic expression of the idea that development is a process, a gradual movement, which will lead to the overcoming of the static dichotomy of developed-underdeveloped. This was, as it has been shown, one of the major conceptual contributions of the civilized-uncivilized dichotomy to the idea of development.

Interestingly, present-day World Bank publications usually carry the following disclaimer: "The term developing economies... does not imply either that all the economies belonging to the group are actually in the process of developing, nor that those not in the group have necessarily reached some preferred or final stage of development."[54] I find it noteworthy that the World Bank, conscious of the intuitive meaning of the terms it uses, finds it necessary to deny or at least constrain the sense of its own wording. The words used in international development policy and assistance are generally a sensitive matter. It is reasonable for the Bank to be cautious in order to avoid misunderstandings and offence. Yet, the meaning that the World Bank excludes from its wording does actually capture a chief characteristic of development.

The dichotomies discussed above are not in no way the only possible examples of asymmetric counterconcepts or the sole historical predecessors of the idea of development. Neither could this necessarily short introduction to the dichotomizations capture their historical complexities in their entirety. Yet, the history of these counterconcepts, even in this brief form, helps us identify both the historical roots and the present character of the concept of development. And it shows that our current idea of development has more in common with the old idea of civilizing the Barbarian than one might initially be inclined to believe.

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[54] World Bank (2008).

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