

# ETNOFOOR anthropological journal

## Call for papers: New Savages

In May 2008 pictures of an ‘isolated’ human group in the Amazon were made public, and swiftly travelled around the world. One of the images shows three men, with the bodies fully painted in red and black, defiantly aiming at the photographer with their arches. Allegedly taken in the heart of the Amazon forest, the pictures were said to represent a tribe that had never had any contact with ‘civilization’ before. The contestation over the authenticity of the images notwithstanding, the high newsworthiness attributed to them reveals an ongoing fascination with the untouched, pure, aboriginal, the ‘savage.’ Long discarded by self-reflexive anthropologists as a notion that might explain why people think and act the way they do, the savage is still very much alive in the larger world.



Image: AP

ETNOFOOR wishes to put the ‘new savage’ - and new forms of savagery – central stage and devote a special issue to exploring its various historical and contemporary tropes. Since anthropology’s early beginnings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the savage was its *raison d’être*. Constituted as a scientific discipline devoted to the study of the cultural other, anthropology came to assign the ‘savage slot’ (Trouillot 1991) in a larger thematic field of civilization and savagery, which preceded anthropology’s institutionalization and gave it continuing coherence. The trained Western observer went on expedition to explore and describe the aboriginal populations of Africa, Latin America or Asia. Many of the ethnographic encounters echoed colonial interests and presumptions about indigenous others, identified as savages, who had a ‘savage mind’ (Lévi-Strauss 1966), and lived in ‘savage societies’ characterized by types of crime and custom, sex and repression (Malinowski 1926), that were intrinsically different from those found in ‘civilized societies.’ As a myth, the savage of course often revealed more about the ethnographer himself and the society he came from than about the object of study. The savage was also deeply ambiguous; s/he could be noble, wise, innocent, victim, or aggressor, depending on the debate and the interlocutors. The savage was both a subject for domestication and civilization and an object of romantic nostalgia.

The savage of course features as the ultimate Other, as the object of fantasies, fears and fascination, and of a wide range of practices of inclusion and exclusion and civilizing projects (Bartra 1997). In postcolonial projects of nation building, states seek to promote a cultural heritage, but struggle with traditional cultural practices that are deemed too 'primitive,' too 'barbaric' to fit a modern nation. 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial cities produced their own 'savages,' the urban underclasses living in their so-described spaces of domestic violence, illiteracy and criminality. In urban anthropology and sociology notions such as 'crimogenic spaces' (Shaw and McKay 1942, Cohen 1955) or 'culture of poverty' (Lewis 1959, Valentine 1968) were coined to explain why some social groups in industrial cities remain problematic and refuse 'to civilise.' More recently, in debates in Europe around immigration, integration, and radicalism, the Muslim 'wildman' (Silverstein 2005) with his long orientalist genealogy has once again come to serve as the alter-ego of a presupposedly 'enlightened' European civilization. Such debates bring to light that global neoliberalism presents a new civilizing endeavour as state and market forces pair up to outlaw specific identities and practices and define new legal and cultural frontiers (Comaroff and Comaroff 2004, Bayart 2007). It thereby creates narratives and typologies of a new savage to civilize: extreme-left/right activists, undocumented residents, religious radicals, drug traffickers, or terrorists.

But the savage is also to be found within. Anthropologists have become increasingly interested in wildness as constitutive of selfhood, many of them inspired by Jojada Verrips' call for attention to the wild (in the) west, that is, the existence and expression of seemingly uncivilized, violent, irrational, and abhorrent phenomena as the flipside of what is known as 'civilization' at the heart of the civilized self (e.g. Van Ginkel and Strating 2007). There is the expression and taming of wildness in healing therapies and religious exorcism, but also the desire for transgressive behaviour and loss of control. Claims to the savage within can serve as powerful means of authentication in the quest for the 'authentic Self,' thus echoing the romantic savage's embodiment of authentic existence. Lastly, we should turn the gaze on ourselves and look for the savage in the ethnographer. Johannes Fabian (2000) has overturned the usual image of the civilized, rational ethnographer, providing material that shows that early European explorers and ethnographers in Africa often worked in extraordinary states influenced by opiates, alcohol, sex, fever, fatigue, and violence; states, Fabian argues, which actually served to enhance cross-cultural understanding.

This issue of ETNOFOOR seeks to explore the registers through which the notion of the savage, and its implied processes of othering, civilizing, fascination and/or yearning, surface in contemporary societies. What links can we see between the classical savage and current imaginations and classifications of savages and wildness? How does the savage feature in present-day politics and aesthetics of otherness? What are the remnants of the old savage within contemporary ethnographic practice and anthropology's implicit premises?

We invite contributions that take seriously the presence of the wild at the heart of every human society and critically engage with the practices, representations, and imaginations through which it finds expression. Interested contributors are invited to submit a paper proposal before 8 January 2010 to [editors@etnofoor.nl](mailto:editors@etnofoor.nl). Proposals should include title, abstract (max. 150 words) and institutional affiliation of the author(s). The deadline for accepted contributions is 1 March 2010. See also our instructions for authors at <http://www.etnofoor.nl/pdf/Instructionsforauthors.pdf>. For further inquiries please contact [editors@etnofoor.nl](mailto:editors@etnofoor.nl).

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