



**Civilized  
Wild**

*by Mariam Popal*

# ›Wild‹ and ›civilized‹<sup>1</sup>

›Wild‹ and ›civilized‹ are two sides of the same sign,  
in certain tongues like this  
and others.

Both terms are one, tied together  
by events in what we perceive and know as history.

›Wild‹ cannot be thought of separately.

Its colors, tones, meanings, and timbres cannot be perceived in themselves.

They fade away into melancholy, into in the clang of the desire for freedom and  
liberty.

When it is evoked, it is evoked as other - inferior, unknowing, irrational,  
different in a degraded way, it cannot represent itself

but negatively

evokes that with which it is placed in a ratio, dichotomous and binary,

that which, from an illusory position of ›power‹, masquerades as its superior.

Thus,

reluctantly, it reveals no part of itself,

but that which is attached to it, that which, for some readings is understood as  
›civilized‹.

An asymmetrical relationship

implicitly

expresses and justifies

a struggle - or rather - an attack.

An attack on ›wildness‹ that has learned to value and own itself within a free  
interior that is otherwise hidden from the silencing sign of such attributions.

In Western narrative traditions, however, it is neither visible nor audible. It has  
learned to echo within hegemonic discourses, alongside ›civilized‹ to subtly,  
barely perceptible, undermine its confidence.

›Civilized‹ stands for the unmarked supremacy of power structures, and ›wildness‹  
stands for all the attributes and ascriptions it imagines itself apart from  
in order to be.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised and expanded version of a text based on the German original entitled »›zivilisiert‹ und ›wild‹« from the following anthology, a critical encyclopedia, *Wie Rassismus aus Wörtern spricht(K)Erben des Kolonialismus im Wissensarchiv deutsche Sprache - Ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk* edited by Nadja Ofuatey-Alazard/Susan Arndt. 4th Edition Münster: Unrast Verlag ([2011|2019), p.678

›Civilized‹ thus describes the order of domination that vainly tries to rule and hide the other half of its desires behind its back (mirror).

By romanticizing ›wildness‹ or presenting it as outside of history and historically outdated - either as a still life on the backward canvas of time or as a future threat looming on its clear and untainted skyline - ›civilized‹ and all its derivatives are invariably cultural representations of (colonial) discourses of power. It others its ›other‹ or altered self in order to romanticize itself.

In colonial discourses and imaginaries, ›wilderness‹ thus signifies muteness, the inability to speak, inferiority, and at the same time danger and threat. As a label of supposed muteness, ›wild‹ stands for immaturity, so it can be subordinated to the label of ›civilized‹. The ›wild‹ can be killed or tamed; the ›wild‹ seems to be absent from the ›civilized‹ order, which can take possession of ›wilderness‹ (place) or ›wildness‹ (state) - at the risk of its own life, which is supposed to make it even more heroic. ›Wildness‹ and ›wilderness‹ symbolize outlawry or ›nature‹; both can be taken, ›discovered‹, desired, and abhorred. ›Civilized‹ is symbolized by the color *white* - and *white* stands for the beautiful, for purity, and innocence. In *white* cultural symbolism, ›wild‹ is symbolized by black.

And  
black  
and  
dark  
stand for courage, grace, resistance, and beauty,  
for freedom and solidarity,  
for a different,  
open view of the wor(l)d,  
for the dissolution of binary and dichotomizing thinking,  
for the ineffability of writing,  
- for you and me.



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