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Ruling over Ethnic and Religious Differences: a comparative essay on empires

Ruling over Ethnic and Religious Differences: a comparative essay on empires[1]

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Abstract

Social systems do not exist in isolation but as parts of larger systems comprising interactions on various scales up to the global level. They are, however, discernible by the density of internal relationships, which justifies a special focus on them as separate sub-systems of larger units. Apart from studying such sub-systems in their interaction, they can be treated as separate cases and compared with each other. This paper looks at historical materials drawn from a number of empires in both ways: as separate cases with an internal logic of rule and as historically interconnected entities, which derive models of rule from their predecessors.

Taking the Moghul Empire in northern India and its Central Asian precursors and models as its starting point, the paper examines relations of sameness and difference among the components of empires. The other examples presented in this paper are the Ottoman Empire and the British in the Sudan. These cases are historically interconnected. The British were part of the ethnic diversity of the Moghul Empire, acting, initially, as Moghul agents. Later, they did the same for Ottomans and their Egyptian offshoots before they managed to assume the leading role themselves. The focus of the paper, however, is not on historical interconnections but on typological comparisons. Recurrent features of the empires under examination include, first, the levelling of ethnic differences among members of the ruling elite, i.e. the amalgamation of the leading strata often by means of individual assimilation, and second, the maintenance and even formalisation and instrumentalisation of ethnic difference between rulers and the ruled and within ruled populations.

The aim of the paper is to open comparative perspectives and to raise questions. No final analysis of even one case is attempted.

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Introduction

Somewhat paradoxically, both difference and sameness are frequently used to explain societal cohesion and forms of political integration. Much has been written about the often violent homogenisation processes that led to the emergence of modern nation states starting in Europe. In the classic example, France, religious minorities had to be massacred or expelled, because they impeded attempts to create a homogeneous nation. Even in the nineteenth century, the transformation of "Peasants into Frenchmen" (Weber 1976) was still underway, and the homogenisation massacres of the twentieth century may trump even the forced conversions and burnings at the stake of suspected dissenters in the early modern period. Some modern nation states have come into being by unification, that is, by integrating smaller units into a larger whole, while others have come into being by the disintegration of larger entities. Irrespective of these different histories, however, modern nation states seem to require a higher degree of cultural sameness than other political entities, including some of earlier periods.

In comparative perspective, as Alexander Horstmann and I theorised years ago (Horstmann and Schlee 2001), a principle diametrically opposed to assimilation and homogenisation, namely 'integration through difference', has obvious advantages, such as the reduction of competition. There seem to be conditions under which ethnically heterogeneous societies and political units can be internally peaceful and remain relatively stable over long periods of time.

In the recent processes of globalisation of the nation-state model, some nation states have incorporated significant levels of ethnic heterogeneity, while others have remained fairly homogeneous or, as late-comers among nation states, are still struggling to achieve a higher degree of national unity along cultural lines.

Thus, nation states show great variation in the degrees of ethnic heterogeneity. Empires, on the other hand, are always ethnically heterogeneous. Contrary to nation states, empires imply ethnic heterogeneity. I cannot really think of an empire with no ethnic or ethnicised distinction between the rulers and the ruled at least, and very often empires comprise great ethnic diversity, which they tend to use for organisational purposes. Generally, the examination of different kinds of reasoning about sameness – or identity – and difference is the key to studying various forms of social and political integration, and this approach seems especially fitting in the comparative study of empires.

Theories that stress the importance of difference for social cohesion or systemic integration[3] implicitly or explicitly assume that sameness has disruptive effects, while those ascribing an integrative value to sameness assume the same disruptive effects for difference. We can thus arrange the arguments in a four-field table, with 'sameness' and 'difference' on one axis and their integrative value ('good' or 'bad' for integration) on the other.

	good for integration	bad for integration
sameness	A	D
difference	B	C

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[3] Cohesion is not the same thing as integration. We here use the word integration not in the sense of social workers who want to achieve something, which is laden with a positive value, but in the sense of system theory. When something becomes an element of a system, it is integrated into that system.

In presenting this four-field table, we keep in mind that, according to what has just been explained, some types imply each other rather than being mutually exclusive. A and C could have been collapsed into one, because people who think that sameness is good for integration also tend to think that difference is bad for it. A similar argument can be made about B and D. Still, many popular convictions stress one aspect *or* the other (e.g. they stress how bad differences are, without concluding that uniformity should be sought). Therefore, for present purposes, we have left the number of theory types at four.

   In the following, I consider popular assumptions in the same way as scholarly theories. Where I mention authors of sociological theories, I risk doing injustice to them by simplifying their positions. Durkheim, for example, has produced an extensive oeuvre rich in inspiration, and there is extensive secondary literature about him. If I here just mention the theorem of "organic solidarity", I aim neither at being original nor at doing justice to Durkheim. I just do what most authors who refer to Durkheim do, i.e. I cite only those aspects of his works which seem useful with regard to my themes. My aim here is not to make a contribution to the history of sociology or anthropology. All I want to achieve is a typology of arguments. In this typology one can include also the perceptions of scholarly theories by a wider readership (the vulgarisations of these theories) or any ideas people have about sameness or difference, and what they mean to integration, irrespective of the origin of these ideas. After an overview of such ideas, we shall ask ourselves how to move on from there.

Sameness as a Mode of Integration

Examples that fit into field A of our graph abound. That people need to become like us in order to belong to us is so widespread an assumption that it could easily fill a book by listing occurrences of it. In the field of sociological theories, those about "acculturation" find their place here (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits 1936). Socialisation theories also stress how young people learn a culture, that is the norms and values of their seniors and peers and then become like them. The concept of culture itself has something about internal homogeneity and external difference to it and that is what sceptics criticise. Culture is the sum of what you need to learn to become a competent member of a particular group, the bearers of that culture. Note that 'culture' in this sentence has been used in two slightly different senses. In its first occurrence it referred to a kind of competence, namely acquired knowledge and acquired skills as distinct from the genetically inherited ones (or the genetic rather than the learned components of complex forms of behaviour), in its second occurrence it was the defining criterion of a bounded group of people, 'a' culture. Where there is *one* culture there are also *many* cultures and that is where the critics come in. Many people dislike the concept of cultures as distinct units one can count, and there are good arguments for this position. Many critics of 'culture(s)' in this sense nevertheless find the term hard to avoid.

What is uncontested is that 'culture' supposes the acquisition of a form of sameness. You acquire culture by learning[4] (no problem so far). And then you become like the other bearers of this culture (and here the problems come in as the singular of the particular [a specific culture] implies the plurality of bounded units [cultures], which are hard to pin down in the empirical reality).

Cultural relativism[5] in its extreme form (which may be a caricature by its critics) assumes a world of mutually non-comprehensible but internally homogeneous 'cultures'. Full humanity would be mediated by successful socialisation into one such culture and full membership in it and that would imply non-comprehension of the other cultures. The counter-argument that one would have to overcome such cultures (to the extent that they exist) in order to become fully human in a more universal sense is also possible.

If one observes debates in the media about the integration of migrants into (post-) industrial societies, one can distinguish between the rejection and the acceptance of migrants. Arguments for rejection stress real or imagined religious or cultural differences. Arguments in favour of immigration often accept a degree of difference or even value it as enriching the society, but would also request the migrants to become like members of the 'host' society in a number of ways. Acquisition of the national language would be one such requirement, while accepting core values (minimal consensus) like democracy and tolerance of other groups, or, going beyond that, to postulate that people have to identify with and to be proud of a constitutional order that transcends the cultures and religions of particular groups (constitutional nationalism) would be other such requirements. The underlying assumption in all cases is that a degree of sameness is a prerequisite of integration (see Pautz 2005 for a critical review of such a debate, the "*Leitkultur*" debate in Germany).

Difference as a Mode of Integration

The obvious starting point of a discussion of difference and its role in society is Durkheim's 'organic solidarity'. He juxtaposes the 'mechanical' solidarity of 'segmentary' societies with the 'organic' solidarity of 'advanced' societies. The former is based on similarities or sameness, the latter on differences. While 'mechanical' is a metaphor, which can be easily traced to physics and technology, both 'segmentary' and 'organic' are biological metaphors. If you cut a worm in the middle, both halves may crawl away in different directions. The cut may heal, nay: the products of the cut heal in two separate places as two separate worms recover from a stressful separation. This is possible because a worm consists of segments which are all alike. Each of them contains everything that is essential to wormishness.[6] If you do the same thing with a mammal, with heart and lungs ending up in one half, the guts and the liver in the other, both parts die. The reason for

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[4] Some anthropologists feel they are doing this. By becoming fluent in another language and acquiring the habits of one's surroundings one can be accepted by a group as one of them. People might make great and very generous efforts to explain away that the anthropologist still looks different, in terms of pigmentation or whatever it may be. As a former stranger one may even have had to think more about 'culture' as one learns it, and one may be able to explain it in ways the people who have grown up in it and acquired it through early habituation have never thought about but find quite interesting. Other anthropologists prefer to mystify what they study and present 'culture' as something one can never really penetrate unless one has grown up in it. These different attitudes may correlate with linguistic skills and other kinds of intellectual performance.

[5] For a critique of relativism see Jarvie (1984).

[6] A hobby fisherwoman among the commentators, who has harmed many worms in her life by using them as bait, warns me against using 'wormishness', because not all worms or worm segments recover from such an injury and because there are differences among various worm species. Anthropologists always find exceptions, as does this commentator. Nevertheless, with these qualifications, the worm might be allowed to stand as an example of the segmentary principle.

this is that organs do not replace each other but are different and in a complementary relationship to each other. The human body is one of the oldest metaphors (the other one being the ship) for state and society. We use this metaphor constantly. Anthropologists speak of 'corporate' groups[7]. 'Corporations', 'corporate America', the 'organs' of the state, the 'body politic', etc. are very much part of common English. The metaphor has been there long before Durkheim, but it is Durkheim's merit to have spelt it out and thought it through.

In a complex organism, the functioning of vital organs is a condition of the survival of the larger organism. Individual organisms are units for selection (not the only ones, but they are) and healthy organisms characterised by a well 'organised' interplay of organs live longer and have more offspring than those whose internal interplay does not unroll so smoothly. The evolution of complex organisms, which in spite of their complexity function remarkably well, is therefore not a surprise from an evolutionary perspective. Humility, of course, demands that we acknowledge immediately that many things in the biosphere are still far beyond human engineering capacities and that admiration and curiosity are the appropriate attitudes toward our fellow organisms. What I mean to say is that, in principle, the emergence of complex forms does not present a problem to the evolutionary paradigm. As entire organisms are units of selection, the functionality of each single organ in the context of the whole becomes an adaptive feature and enhances fitness (in the biological sense of number of progeny). There is no problem here with explaining certain things by their functions. Selection here favours functionality. As we transfer the concepts of 'part', 'whole' and 'functions' to society, however, they very soon turn out to be quite hairy. What is the whole? Of what is a part a part? Why should a part care about being functional for the whole? Or, if no intentions are involved, by which mechanism is this achieved? What is the unit of selection in the evolution of society or societies?

Durkheim's position may be called 'proto-functionalist' or 'functionalist *avant la lettre*'. It is an answer to the question 'what keeps society together?' This may appear to be a difficult question,[8] but it is not as difficult as the next one. The more difficult question is 'how did that, which keeps society together, come about?' Whatever it is that causes societal cohesion, it must have evolved. Have societies with more cohesion survived while the ones with more disruptive internal dynamics have ceased to exist? Has cohesion, whatever its mechanisms are, evolved through variation and selection between societies? Apart from being loaded with the burden of having to define what 'a society' is and which 'societies' present different cases and units of selection, there are other reasons not to pursue this type of question.

So far all answers to this question, which takes entire systems as its starting point, have been unsatisfactory. To base an evolutionary model of cultural development on system selection is not very convincing because such processes would require enormous periods of time.

In the 1970s, ecologically oriented neo-functionalists[9] tried to explain the functional interplay internal to 'cultures' and 'societies' by system selection. Their theory implied the following: Those social orders, which did not work well, have disappeared. Members of the surviving societies are not aware of the functional aspects of their beliefs and practices. If they had been, this might even

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[7] Zitelmann (1999) explores some of the ideological load of this concept.
[8] The difficulties include defining what is kept together (society, a particular society, within which limits?), the definition of a coherent or undisrupted (ideal) state of such an entity as a backdrop against which disruptive forces can be identified, the identification of forces of cohesion/disruption, and the measurement of cohesion and disruption (the effects of these forces).
[9] See Harris (1974) for an example.

have been detrimental. A morality based on religion only works if people believe in religion and not just in its instrumentality or functionality. People who explain religion by saying that it is good for society if people (preferably others) believe in it, might not be the strongest believers and strongest holders of religion based moralities. The functioning of the system required for those theorists that its parts worked unconsciously. Conscious processes such as social engineering (or simply sitting together to organise things so that they work better) played a negligible role in this kind of theory. The costs of evolution were high. Entire systems had to die and new ones had to come into being. How many millennia this would take was not specified by these theorists.

For a better explanation of social change, including the emergence of 'coherence' or 'integration', we need a theory that fits historical timeframes such as years, decades, or centuries, and does not demand spans of time of the order of magnitude of biological evolution. Selection by the demise of entire 'cultures' and the emergence of new ones would require enormous expanses of time, especially if we take into account the possibility that, like in biological evolution, also the death of 'a culture' may often be accidental and the direction of evolution be only discernible statistically and over a long period of time punctuated by countless deaths. In order to fit historical timeframes, we need to get down to smaller units of selection with shorter lives.

I suggest that the decisions taken by individuals are suitable units of this kind. If we suspect that we have taken a wrong decision and become aware of alternatives, we may reject a decision and replace it by another one within a second or a day. How to get from the decisions of many individuals to the change of social systems is another problem, known as the micro/macro problem. I do not claim to have solved it. I just claim that we do not get around it. We cannot just remain at the level of systems. Nor can we remain at the level of individual action. Any theory about societal processes (emergence of coherence, integration, conflict, social change ...) demands to link the actor's perspective with the system perspective.

The actors' perspectives offer some insight about the emergence of difference and the evolution of complementary relations on higher levels of aggregation and organisation. Actors actually and at least partly intentionally[10] differentiate themselves from each other. They may actively strive to avoid competition or demands for the redistribution of acquired wealth. A relevant theorem in this context is the trader's dilemma. This theorem has been developed on the basis of empirical examples of traders in rural areas remote from state control. It is about finding an arrangement with one's customers without having much recourse to third parties (the state might be out of reach or be perceived as hostile).

What Evers (Evers and Schrader 1994) has called the trader's dilemma is this: If the trader defines himself too much as a foreigner, he risks his life; if he becomes too much a local person, he loses his profit. Tradespeople of foreign descent always live on the edge between these two forms of failure. They have to be foreign enough not to be obliged to grant credit. If they are too similar to the local population, conversions to other religions or sects may occur to create this difference. If the foreignness is not to change into hostility, it has to be counterbalanced by a certain degree of charity. That is why minorities which are successful in business often practice ostentative generosity. E.g. the Aga Khan hospitals and other social institutions might have contributed a lot to

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[10] Some authors regard self-reflection as the specific feature which makes us human. In practice, some people are clearer and more explicit about their motivations than others.

the members of the Isma'iliyya sect being accepted in many parts of the world.[11] This way, interethnic relations constantly need to rebalance social distance.

These individual or small-group strategies at least partly explain why, on the macro level, we often, all over the world, find culturally distinct trading minorities. It sadly also is part of the explanation why they repeatedly become victims of communal violence, in the worst cases of genocides. The balance between belonging and remaining distinct is precarious.

Difference as an Obstacle to Integration

'Identity-based conflicts' has become a very popular catchword in recent conflict theories. This catchword is accompanied by another one, namely 'resource-based conflicts', and by the claim that 'identity-based conflicts' are much more bitter and tend to be more violent than 'resource-based conflicts', which can be solved by negotiations and peaceful sharing.[12] There is a basic flaw to this line of reasoning. The definition of 'identities' or the study of 'identification' aims at answering questions starting with 'who' while the resource issue addresses the question 'about what'. Who-questions (like who with whom against whom, along which lines of identification, religious, ethnic, or whatever) need to be asked in the analysis of any conflict and the same is true for the question 'about what?' (Water, oil, jobs, political representation ...). 'Identity' and 'resources' are not qualifiers of different kinds of conflict but different aspects under which to regard all conflicts. (Schlee 2009: 572)

In the present context of theories, which regard difference as an obstacle to integration we can state that people who talk about 'identity-based conflicts' tend to regard difference as such an obstacle. Note that 'theories' is used here in a rather value-free way. We do not discuss whether statements need to meet a standard of scholarliness to deserve the name 'theory'.

Popular usages of the term 'difference' suggest that there is a wide-spread implicit conviction that differences are a cause of conflict. In phrases like "people fight out their differences", 'difference(s)' is used as a euphemism for 'quarrel' or 'dispute'.

Sameness as an Obstacle to Integration

Type D theories, which imply that sameness is an obstacle to integration, are negative versions or mirror images (putting the same thing the other way around) of type B theories, which stress the integrative aspects of difference. Still there are some theories, which put the emphasis on the disruptive effects of closeness and sameness rather than on integration through difference, although both ways to state the problem lead to the same conclusions.

There is no category of people with which we share more of what defines us as us than our full siblings. We share with them as many genes as with our parents or children, and in addition we are of the same generation, in the case of multiple births (less frequent in humans than in other mammals) even of the same age and in roughly fifty per cent of the cases of the same gender. Still 'sibling rivalry' is a phrase of wide currency coined for a frequent phenomenon. Students of animal behaviour as well as anthropologists use it a lot. Sibling rivalry takes the form of a deadly scramble

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[11] Cf. Aga Khan Development Network. (www.akdn.org, accessed April 24, 2013)
[12] See Rothman (2000) for a theory that makes a basic distinction between identity-based conflicts and resource- or interest-based ones and advocates different strategies for dealing with each. See Schlee (2009) for a critique of this kind of reasoning.

when there are more piglets than the sow has teats. Milder forms, which many of us can observe in their own families, are teasing and boasting among children.

Siblings tend to compete for the same resources, whether immaterial ones like the love of their parents or material ones. In a large proportion of humankind, for which the provisioning of basic nutrients is precarious, close birth spacing may reduce the chances of survival of individual children. The competition is about food, and what is at stake is survival. Where people can afford to have more complex needs than to fill their bellies, sibling rivalry is about parental attention and support, rank or position in peer groups, inheritance, or succession. From the Book of Genesis onwards, the literature of the world abounds with examples.

Sameness or similarity in many ways increases the chances of having to compete for the same things. 'Sameness as an obstacle to integration' therefore is the flip side of the 'competition avoidance by differentiation' hypothesis discussed under B.

It has often been observed that it is the minimal difference, which is most often emphasised with a negative evaluation and in the context of manifest or latent hostility. Middle class people denigrate lower middle class people. Discrimination is directed against members of adjacent classes (Fox 2004: 119). Not that everything said in such a context reflects good taste, but it would certainly be considered to be worse to talk in a depreciating way about someone much below oneself on the commonly perceived social scale than to talk in this way about someone closer to oneself in social position. A person in an elevated and secure social position would not feel the need to deplore the lack of style or the rude manners of the classes engaged in manual labour, and if he or she did so it might be perceived as arrogant and bad taste.

The principle of the minimal difference not only applies to class but to all axes of social identification. The sound of a language unrelated to our own and which we have never heard before will elicit few emotions in us apart from, maybe, friendly curiosity. It is mostly neighbouring dialects, which are perceived as ugly, harsh, inarticulate, arrogant, sloppy, boorish, arrogant, etc. They are ascribed aesthetic values regarded as indicative of character features of their speakers. Or take religion. Protestants tend to direct their suspicions about idolatry and latent polytheism (in the guise of saint worship) against Catholics, not against Hindus.[13]

Class and dialect distinctions in language are relevant within a language community. Speakers of other languages would hardly understand what these minimal differences are all about. On similarly low levels of difference, we struggle about the correct interpretation of our own religious heritage. Tolerance is more easily applied to adherents of other religions than to the ones of the 'wrong' interpretations of our own. Taking into account that a discourse about language may not really be about language and one about religion not only about religion, we may have a look at the social context. We then may find that these discourses tend to be about people who are in many ways close to us, so close, that they may occupy the positions we claim for ourselves or become economic rivals. The emphasis on the minimal difference articulates the rivalry 'within': within a political system, within a certain segment of the job market, within an intellectual community, etc. It has as much to do with sameness as with difference.

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[13] To balance the picture, the reciprocal element, the Catholic dislike of Protestants, also needs to be voiced. A German woman from the Catholic south once told me how, many years ago, she wanted to familiarise her father with her intention to marry her present husband, an Arab. It took her father some time to swallow that his future son-in-law was an Arab, but he managed to contain himself. He expected him to be a Muslim and was about to accept even that with a sigh. He only blew his top when his daughter told him that the young man was a Lutheran Christian. "How dare you!"

The Interplay of Difference and Sameness in Processes of Social Integration

To get beyond this four-field table, which roughly classifies existing social theories and popular assumptions about difference and sameness according to the value they ascribe to them for social integration, we need to look at real life situations. There we do not find sameness or difference just to be good or bad for integration, but we find the complex interplay of both sameness and difference in processes of integration. Differences are handled. They may be a factor in the peaceful division of labour, but at the same time their disruptive potential must be bridled. Interaction in some contexts, like the market, and avoidance in other contexts are possible solutions.

How much interaction there should be, for the sake of peace, is also a time-honoured question. Living in a world of warlike emerging nation states, classic political theorists have discussed how to achieve peace between different groups or polities. Rousseau proposes economic self-sufficiency and isolation. The less interaction there is the less interaction can go wrong. The probability of war is lessened (Joas 2000: 55). Others hold just the opposite view and propose to multiply links between the potential rivals and enemies. Kant suggests constitutional arrangements and contracts, an eighteenth century premonition of the EU, and Adam Smith perceives trade as a vehicle of peaceful integration (ibid.: 56).

If one wants to take up such lines of reasoning today, one can no longer simply assume the different states or groups to be different as if their differences were a natural given. One has to discuss the construction of cultural difference, which is closely interwoven with the different forms of interaction, peaceful or hostile, one wants to study.

Rather than treating this problem as one of minimising or maximising interaction, one may more fruitfully treat it as one of optimisation. How can one reap as many advantages of interaction as possible without incurring too many of the costs and risks associated with it?

Another way to look at the same problem is to pose the question of how social distance is handled. If you want to rule over someone, you need at least some social distance, which has to do with a postulated difference. In a situation of total familiarity and equality, there can be no rule of one over another. On the other hand, a degree of identification and some feeling of closeness between rulers and ruled reduce the costs of rule by reducing the necessity of monitoring, control, and violent oppression. So here, as is often the case in life, we find the optimal solution to be somewhere in the middle. If, in a Machiavellian fashion, we want to teach how to rule (which is not my primary concern), we can tell those who aspire to rule neither to be too close to nor too distant from the ones they want to rule. The optimal social distance is in-between.

Yet another approach to the same basic problem is that taken by Kraft, Lüdtke, and Martschukat (2010: 10 ff.) in their introduction to a recent volume presenting new perspectives on colonialism. They juxtapose perceptions of clearly marked boundaries between coloniser and colonised, premised on total otherness, with stories about everyday life in which this boundary was blurred. In complex settings marked by apparent paradoxes – e.g. the co-existence, in a given relationship, of exploitation and paternalistic benevolence or the claims of colonisers that colonial subjects are racially inferior and, simultaneously, amenable to elevation by a civilising mission – difference is constantly re-negotiated.

In the following, I will go through a number of historical examples of empires, examining how ethnic diversity was handled in each case. This journey across continents and through different eras

is a search for patterns. I can already promise that we are going to find several such recurring patterns.

Moghul India

Moghul or Mughal is a corruption of the word 'Mongol'. To which extent the Moghul rulers of sixteenth-century India were Mongols, however, requires some clarification.

In central Asia, the formation of new peoples has repeatedly followed the following pattern: Turkic speaking nomads conquered agricultural areas inhabited by speakers of Eastern Iranian languages such as Sogdian. The modern Uzbeks were formed in this way. Their name and some elements of the population stem from a group of Turkic nomads, but modern Uzbeks descend primarily from Iranian (in the linguistic sense) agriculturalists and other oasis dwellers. Many of them still speak an Iranian language, Tajik, and the Turkic dialects of the others have undergone phonetic and lexical changes that reflect an Iranian substratum (Finke 2006a; Turaeva 2010). The Barlas, the tribe of Timur Leng or Tamerlane, the ancestor of the Indian Moghuls, are also an example for this pattern. Claiming Mongolian origin, the Barlas were bilingual in Tajik and the Chagatai dialect of Turkic.

With the expansion of the Mongols under Chinggis Khan, many Central Asian Turkic groups incorporated aristocratic elements of Chinggisid origin. For a long time, a legitimate claim to rule had to be based on Chinggisid ancestry. Unfortunately for this purpose, the ancestors of the Barlas were the wrong kind of Mongols (Finke 2006b: 112–119). They did not descend from Chinggis Khan and were not even of his clan, Borjigin.

The Timurids were defeated in Central Asia by the Uzbeks, another group of warlike Turkic speaking ex-nomads, only partly identical with the modern nation that bears that name. Subsequently, the Timurids withdrew to what now is Afghanistan and later to India, where Babur, a fifth-generation descendent of Timur, established the Moghul Empire in the second quarter of the sixteenth century. By this time, links to Chinggisid nobility had been established by marriage and uterine descent. Intermarriage was also practiced with Persian nobility. Culturally, the Moghuls were no less eclectic than they were genealogically. They had reverted to a Persian language – not to their ancestral Sogdian but to Farsi, the flourishing modern literary language which – without the intrusion of Russian into Central Asia[14] and the quite recent spread of English in South Asia – would have developed into the unifying language for a large chunk of the Muslim world. Apart from that they spoke less prestigious languages such as Chagatai Turkic and Hindi. Arabic was used for religious instructions (Foltz 1998: 4–5, 14).

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[14] Soviet language policy had the result of promoting Russian at the level of the Union and different Turkic languages at the level of the Republic all over Central Asia with the exception of Tajikistan.

The Moghul Empire was not only polyglot but also pluriethnic and religiously heterogeneous. There were Indian Muslims and even Hindus in the army (Foltz 1998: 5),[15] and in his budget planning Sultan Akbar (1542–1605) relied heavily on a Hindu financial wizard (Foltz 1998: 15). Hindu and other Indian merchants and money lenders were a major economic factor not only locally but all the way north to Central Asia (Foltz 1998: 62). The cultural climate was one of tolerance and debate. The Moghuls were Sunni Muslims, but Shi'ite Persian civilisation was held in high esteem (ibid.: 15). Taxation under Akbar did not distinguish between Hindus and Muslims (ibid.: 6). Even European scholars and artists were attracted by Moghul generosity: "Portuguese priests regularly participated in religious debates, Italian doctors tended to the health of the elite, and madonnas and cherubim found their way into Indian paintings." (ibid.: 77)

Atypically for a Moghul, who would be expected to die in battle or in a succession struggle with a son or brother, one emperor, Hamayun, died falling down the steps of his library (Kulke and Rothermund 2010 [1986]: 125), reminding us of the dangers of scholarship. A cursory glance at the literature makes Moghul rulers appear rather enlightened, even as precursors of modern pluralism and multiculturalism. We will return to the question of religious plurality in the Moghul Empire below.

My sources did not reveal the extent to which ethnic and religious groups formed units of administration within the subject population, as they did in the Ottoman *millet* system. The impression I got from my limited reading was that cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions mixed freely in individuals, rather than being instrumentalised for the construction of social boundaries and inter-group relations.

So, the Moghul Empire may not have been a group mosaic at all levels, as was the case with some of the other empires we are going to discuss. In its leading strata, it even had a cosmopolitan flair. But we still need a closer look to answer two questions:

1. Was there an ethnic core among the rulers? After all they were known by an ethnonym, Moghul or Mughal, which equals 'Mongols'.
2. How does the ethnic diversity within this empire compare with modern forms of pluralism and multiculturalism?

To answer the first question, we have to look back into history, as the Moghuls themselves did. For them, Chinggis Khan was the model ruler. Descent from Chinggis Khan conveyed legitimacy to a ruler. To compensate the shortcoming of being Barlas by tribe, rather than being patrilineal descendants of Chinggis Khan, the ancestors of Moghul rulers, since the time of Timur Leng, had married daughters of Chinggisid princes. Thus, their descendants could claim descent from the ruler of the world at least in the way that will forever remain the second best in patrilineal and patriarchal societies, namely through their mothers or grandmothers. They did the same with

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[15] In the long history of Islam in Northern India before the Moghuls, we find earlier instances of including non-Muslims in Muslim armies and bureaucracies, just as we find views critical of this practice. "One of the most widely read authors of pre-Mughal India", (Alam 2000: 220) Zia-ud-Din Barani, "advised that non-Muslims be taken into state service to some degree. The existence of non-Muslim soldiers in the army of Mahmud, the first Muslim conqueror of Northern India, fighting the enemies of Islam, was enough of a reason for him not to abhor their presence." (ibid.: 225) These quotations show that one had incorporation as well as a segregation of non-Muslims also in pre-Moghul India, often the norm being segregationist and purist, the practice being more liberal. Of course, the norms themselves can be taken as an indicator of the presence of practices deviating from the norm, because otherwise the norms would not be needed. Mudabbir, another pre-Moghul author, "recommends state offices only for religious, pious, and God-fearing Muslims." (ibid.: 219) To keep rulers and the ruled visibly apart, Mudabbir recommended, in a way reminiscent of later Ottoman practices in another part of the world, that "The people of the *zimma* [non-Muslims living under Muslim protection] should not ride on horses, should not wear clothes like Muslims or live like Muslims." (ibid.: 219)

Ashraaf ladies (plural of *shariif* – noble, descendant of the Prophet). They married them so that their offspring could claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima. Thus, the Moghuls derived their special status from descent from two personalities, who would hardly have gotten along had they ever met.

Once we assume that Chinggis Khan was a role model for the Moghuls, it seems advisable to examine the significance of tribal and ethnic identities in this ruler's political system. Tamüjin, the future Chinggis Khan, was born into a segmentary social order of the classic type (see Evans-Pritchard 1940; Lewis 1961; Sigrist 1994) in which smaller patrilineal units are embedded in larger ones. The smallest residential and genealogical unit was called *ger*. This term means, literally, 'house' or 'yurt' and in its extended genealogical sense stands for a slightly larger group occupying several yurts, namely, a man, his wife or wives, their unmarried children, and their married sons and their wives and children – i.e. a patrilineal extended family. A cluster of *ger* is called an *ayil* or village. People of the same village are assumed to be of the same clan, *oboq*, which in turn comprises a plurality of villages sharing one clan territory.

Chinggis Khan's decisive innovation consisted of making his military organisation independent, to a significant degree, of this clan structure and clan-based loyalties. Leaders who submitted to him might be given command of one of the new units of a thousand (composed the hundreds and tens, with their respective leaders) into which Chinggis Khan divided his fighting force. Such units of a thousand might then be composed largely of clansmen of the commander, who had followed him prior to his submission to Chinggis Khan. Clans or tribal forces that resisted Chinggis Khan, however, were scattered, and their fragments were recombined into other units of thousand that were not based on genealogical proximity among their members. Distinguished soldiers were appointed as leaders of such units, irrespective of their origins. In yet other cases, clan leaders were replaced by junior members of their own lineages, if the junior members were more willing to cooperate. Thus, old tribal aristocracies were replaced by a new meritocracy. If, as was occasionally the case, former leaders were confirmed in their positions, they now had to conform to new criteria. (Hesse 1982)[16]

As the empire expanded, it subjected city and oasis dwellers, who had to pay tribute to avoid annihilation, and it also incorporated more and more nomadic warriors into the fighting force. In the east, these were Manchu, speakers of a Tungus (Evenki) language,[17] but mostly it was speakers of Turkic languages who became numerically dominant in the Mongol fighting force (McNeill 1997: 308). Thus, the new meritocracy came to be not only cross-clan but transethnic, even non-ethnic, because the recruitment of and the modes of articulation among its members was based not on ethnicity but on what McNeill calls – with a very modern – Weberian undertone, the "bureaucratic principle" (ibid.: 307). No such amalgamation took place among the sedentary subject peoples. They had to remain distinct from the rulers, so that it was clear who had to pay tribute to whom.

In religious matters, the Mongols appear to have been open and receptive. Both at Chinggis Khan's residence, Karakorum, and later at his grandson Kublai Khan's capital, just outside modern Beijing, every religion was represented in a fashion reminiscent of the religious 'markets' in modern, pluralist societies. The hopes of Christian missionaries to make converts, however, were

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[16] For more detailed references to Hesse see Schlee (2005: 39–42).

[17] The languages of this family have a remarkable distribution. Their speakers are found among hunters and reindeer herders across Siberia but where also found in the Forbidden City in Beijing until 1913. The Emperor was of the Manchu Dynasty and his courtiers and concubines had to learn the Manchu language.

disappointed. These early Mongol rulers seemed to be interested in being on the safe side by consulting diviners and ritual experts of all sorts, rather than putting all their eggs in one basket by committing themselves to a particular religion.

After this big chronological leap back to the time of Chinggis Khan, we now return to the Moghuls in India in long strides, pausing along the way to consider an intermediary formation of power, one which was important as a "role model and reference point" (Foltz 1998: 22) for the Moghuls themselves[18]: the empire of Timur Leng. Proper historians would proceed more cautiously and note more details along the way; but my purpose is typological. Therefore, the following dates might suffice. Chinggis Khan ruled from 1206 to his death in 1227. Timur Leng was born roughly one hundred years later, between 1320 and 1330. In this interval, western branches of Turko-Mongolian dynasties had converted to Islam. Timur himself was enough of a Muslim to restrict himself, most unusually for a ruler in those days, to four wives. He died in 1404. Babur, the founder of the Moghul Empire in India, was Timur's fifth generation descendant. He was the ruler of Kabul from where he set out to conquer India in 1525. The Moghul conquest was by no means a Muslim war against Hindus. There had been Muslims, including Muslim rulers, in India for centuries. And the category 'Hindu' would have been an anachronism in this context, anyhow. It came into use only later, during the British colonial period. Nor were the Moghuls the first Turko-Mongolians to rule in India. The most important predecessor of the Moghul Empire, the Sultanate of Delhi, which was once devastated by Timur and was lastingly conquered by Babur, was, in its final phase, ruled by another Turko-Mongolian dynasty, the Tughlaq.

Back to Timur: insofar as sons tend to succeed their fathers in high office, meritocracies develop, over time, into hereditary aristocracies. Similarly, military units start to behave like descent groups as soon as the recruitment of the sons of the aging soldiers becomes habitual. After a while they become like clans, because people are born into them. By the time of Timur Leng, the Turko-Mongolian world, including the domain of the Ulus Chaghatay, which was his immediate political environment, had become re-tribalised to a significant degree. Therefore, he had to repeat the efforts of Chinggis Khan in building up a non-tribal army loyal to him personally.

The Ulus Chaghatay comprised Transoxania (modern Uzbekistan) and much of what today is northern and eastern Afghanistan. It used to be ruled by descendants of Chinggis Khan's second son, Chaghaday, but by the fourteenth century, the time of Timur, these Chaghadayids were often puppets of men who pretended to rule in their name as "commanders" (*emirs*) (Manz 1999 [1989]: 21). These real rulers were not necessarily tribal leaders who derived their legitimacy from any line of succession or order of seniority. Often, alliances with outsiders allowed pretenders to leadership to prevail over their rivals.[19] Power was based on the potential for violence. The history of internal power games in the Ulus Chaghatay is too complex to be summarised here, even in the roughest outline, as fortunes changed year by year. All this suggests, however, a higher blood toll than was actually paid. War was the day-to-day business of the steppe nomads, but they did not need to fight a battle if the outcome was clear in advance. New arrangements could be dictated by those who showed up with a larger following on the battle ground (ibid.: 63). Superficially, these power

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[18] Timur himself had only briefly made conquests in India but is still of enormous importance for the Moghul self-image and legitimacy. Foltz (1998: 22) also gives iconographic examples for this.

[19] See Manz (1999 [1989]: 42). In terms of patterns of conflict, this is reminiscent of New Guinea. The Manembu mistrust their co-villagers who have important links outside the village to such an extent, that killing the external ally of an internal rival is a frequent starting point of violent conflict (Harrison 1993, for a discussion see Schlee 2008: 50f).

games look a bit like democracy, but the similarity does not go much beyond the importance of numbers.

The name of the game was to keep the power base non-tribal or, to the extent that tribal influences could not be ignored, to keep them carefully balanced. To maintain his position within his clan, Barlas, Timur needed followers both inside and outside of it. Through the marriage of his sister or of his children as well as through marriages of his own, he secured alliances with powerful figures of other tribes (ibid.: 46). In addition to seeking allies, Timur cultivated valuable followers of an entirely different kind, namely, warriors with no power base of their own, who were entirely dependent on him (ibid.: 65). Timur's army, although it did contain tribes, was not an alliance of tribes that could join or quit as they chose, as had been characteristic previously of armies in the Ulus Chaghatay. It was Timur and his appointees who were in command, and these appointees were not necessarily the leaders who had brought along their tribesmen, when they joined Timur (ibid.: 104). So, in his own fashion, Timur managed to repeat Chinggis Khan's feat of creating a non-tribal army, whose members were loyal to him.

Conquest is about the acquisition of assets by force. For Timur, these assets were the sedentary peoples of the cities and oases. Not much effort was made to administer these people. The army came from time to collect tribute and then left the subject peoples alone again.

Not all subjects were sedentary, however. There were also nomads, who had not joined Timur in time and then were defeated by him. Timur's army was itself a nomad army, and his soldiers drove herds along to feed themselves and the families accompanying them; but extensive campaigns exhausted these stocks. To replenish them, other nomads were raided. Timur caused these other nomads to be resettled across huge distances, where they had no political or military clout but were still available, should Timur's army have need to replenish its animal resources (Manz 1999 [1989]: 101f.).

After our excursion into the Central Asian past of the Indian Moghuls, we now move back to them to ask the same question as we have posed regarding the empires of Chinggis Khan and Timur: What was the role of ethnicity in the Moghul army and in the inner circle of power? We have already mentioned the role of Persian and Chagatai Turkic. Of these two languages, the former was dominant at the court and the latter among the army leadership. Both distinguished the rulers from the ruled, who spoke Hindi and many other Indic languages. Foltz describes one scene at the court, in which songs were invited, first in Persian and then in Turkic (Foltz 1998: 38). This seems to suggest that both languages were accorded an elevated status and treated as roughly equal, with a slight advantage for Persian. Over time, a new language developed, a variety of Hindi that incorporated many Arabo-Islamic and Persian concepts: Urdu (Kulke and Rothermund 2010 [1986]: 153). Etymologically, 'Urdu' is the same word as English 'horde', German 'Horde' and Turkish 'ordu'. It comes from the Mongolian word 'ordo', which refers to the military encampment where the language was in fact used.

This linguistic development reflects a social development. The Moghuls incorporated many Indians of all social strata, from slaves to aristocrats, into the ruling elite. But while Chinggis Khan and Timur Leng both managed to forge a homogeneous warrior class out of diverse ethnic or tribal origins and to keep this stratum distinct from the tribute-paying subjects, the Indians who had entered the ruling elite remained distinct. What is more, they frequently had a local power base of their own and could often remain semi-independent or managed to re-assert a degree of independence over time.

By the time the British East India Company (BEIC) established its footholds in India, Murshid Quli Khan, the Moghul governor of Bengal, ruled "as if he was an independent prince" (Kulke and Rothermund 2010 [1986]: 161). He was a Brahmin, who had converted to Islam, and he established his own capital, Murshidabad, from where he ruled not only Bengal but also Bihar and Orissa, which he had conquered. He was a progressive ruler, who collected revenue in cash rather than in kind (ibid.).

In collecting revenues, he was assisted by the British. The BEIC, which had been established in 1600 by Queen Elizabeth, penetrated the subcontinent in the seventeenth century with a network of 'factories' (fortified warehouses) attempting in this way to monopolise trade with Europe. Apart from trade, the Company discovered another kind of income: tax farming. Moghul princes and governors, Murshid among them, often sold or rented the right to collect taxes in a certain area to tax farmers, and the BEIC entered into such arrangements with him. Subsequently, "[t]he relatively small fee that it cost to buy the right to collect revenue in the regions surrounding its factory brought substantial annual returns." (Parsons 2010: 171)

Let us pause a moment to look at the logic of tax farming. If a ruler farms out the right to collect revenues to a tax farmer, he must have a power base outside this relationship, because, inside this relationship, the tax farmer seems to be in a stronger position. The income of the ruler is the fee the tax farmer pays for the privilege to collect taxes. So, the ruler is dependent on the tax farmer for this source of revenue. The tax farmer, however, does not necessarily need the ruler, as he must obviously be able to enforce tax payments without the help of the ruler. Nor would the tax farmer expect any other services from the state to which he surrenders the taxes he has collected. Conquest states or empires are not institutions, which provide services,[20] apart, maybe, from protection against other such states. Thus, if they could avoid punishment by the ruler for non-compliance, tax farmers might be better off on their own. They could keep a larger share of the revenue, even if they had to invest some of it in raising forces to protect their loot from rivals. In sum, the tax farmer, especially if he also holds other powers, such as command over a garrison, or assets, such as estates, is a potential traitor.

In itself, tax farming leaves a wide range of discretion to the tax farmer. The arrangement is typically applied in areas that are not controlled by the central bureaucracy. In areas that are within the reach of the bureaucracy, based in the capital, there is no need for it. As is the case with social distance, which we discussed earlier, taxation follows the logic of optimisation. In the case of unnecessarily low taxes, the state, the ruler, or the tax farmer foregoes potential gain. If, on the other extreme, taxes are very high, tax evasion will increase, as will the costs of control. High taxes may also cause resistance and raise the costs of oppression. In the case of tax farming in a province on the fringe of an empire, the tax farmer can apply his own optimisation strategy. He can test how

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[20] That conquest states on the whole did not provide services, that they were there to take things and not to dish out, does not mean that there were no normative ideas around that this should be otherwise. In the European tradition, the earliest formulations regarding the ideal ruler may be found in the epics, histories, and philosophical works of classical antiquity. These were, in turn, important sources for the genre known as the *speculum principum* (mirror of princes), beginning in the Middle Ages (Philipp and Stammen 1996). Texts of this type contained theories about the proper behaviour of the ruler in improving the lives of his subjects or in guiding the state in the service of the common good. In this way, political theorists could suggest which tasks the ruler should perform, as can be shown with reference to an analogous genre in another region. Abul Hasan al-Marwadi (974–1058), a North-Indian writer, suggested that "the authority of the caliph was supreme, and among his important duties were defence of the *shariᶜa*, dispensation of justice according to the *shariᶜa,* and organisation of the *jihad.*" (Alam 2000: 217) Even some of the most violent conquerors might have subscribed to such ideologies and claimed that they were living up to such ideals. Of course, whether or not rulers were restricted or influenced in any way by scholars who set agendas for them remains an empirical question, which may or may not be answerable, depending on available sources.

much people can pay without suffering a decline in productivity, and how much he can demand without causing out-migration or rebellion. He can grant tax exemptions to his supporters or to specialists whom he needs to develop his fief, and he can impose punitive taxes on undesired people or activities. So, tax collection itself provides a wide space of 'agency', to use a sociological term; it is a domain in which power is exercised and increased. It is thus also a resource of power.

The BEIC provides one example of tax farmers who turned into a threat to their overlords, the Moghuls in Bengal and other rulers all over India. Indian kings ended up as their puppets. Tax farming was, of course, not the only factor causing the rise of the British as a colonial power in India. They also had a navy and they made profits in trade, and so on. It is not my ambition to write a history of India. My modest aim here is to find some points of comparison between empires, and, indeed, we will return to tax farming in comments on the Ottoman Empire. Tax farming is merely one form of administration and revenue collection used by empires. It is a distanced, low cost, and low return form of rule. It is often the preferred option that empires take up at their fringes. It is fraught with the risk of defection, and empires use it for lack of something better.

Due, perhaps among other things, to their reliance on tax farmers of diverse ethnic origins, who did not, as agents should, identify with their principals, the Moghuls did not succeed to the same extent as Chinggis Khan or Timur Leng in creating a de-ethnicised, de-tribalised elite loyal only to the ruler. Whether out of necessity or inclination, they co-opted more strangers than they could assimilate, if indeed they made efforts to do so. The result was that their rule was ended by defectors, including the British, i.e. agents of the ruler who transformed themselves into rulers in their own right and finally into rulers of rulers.

Following on the discussion of sameness or difference in linguistic and ethnic terms, we now turn once more to religion to address the same problem in a different domain and along different lines of identification. Descriptions of inter-faith dialogue, as it is called, using the latest jargon, or of debates among representatives of different religions at the court of Akbar give the impression of a tolerant or even pluralist religious attitude. Was this an early form of secularism? If so, was it the kind of secularism that we know from the French revolution, which was anti-religious? Or was it the American type of secularism, which is an arrangement among deeply religious people, who want to keep their mutually exclusive beliefs out of the sphere of politics and administration? Can it be compared to modern religious markets, where people help themselves according to personal tastes and preferences? Were the Moghuls multi-culturalists and religious pluralists?

A closer look reveals that all of these questions have to be answered in the negative: None of the above. Akbar consulted the wise men of all religions in order to find the truth, the one truth. He perceived himself as the founder of *Din-ul-Lah*, the Religion of God. He wanted to overcome the division of mankind into religious communities by combining the elements of truth, which he believed every religion contains, into a unified religion.

Akbar was thus not a pluralist in the modern sense, but a 'wise ruler' similar to Alfonso the Wise of Castile. Alfonso was open to outside influences and was fascinated by things, which were difficult to attain: hidden or secret knowledge and knowledge from far away that needed translation. But I think that it is safe to assume that he was looking for the one truth beneath the surface of things, and that he was not a relativist in the modern sense believing in as many truths as there are perspectives. Foreign knowledge about topics that we, today, would call political science or natural science certainly did not shake his Christian beliefs, although stereotypes about the

supposedly Jewish nature of the quest for worldly knowledge began to arise in his day – which might have left him open to attack by his adversaries (Nirenberg 2012).

To some extent, Akbar also reminds us of Chinggis Khan or Kublai Khan, who, as we have seen above, were looking for elements of the truth or something of magical or prognostic value in all religious and belief systems within their orbit. But unlike these (and unlike Alfonso), Akbar had the ambition to combine elements of heterogeneous origin into a unified religion of his own making.

In this he did not differ much from the Sikhs. Sikhism was another attempt to overcome the divide between Hinduism and Islam. Much like Martin Luther, who wanted to reform the church rather than found a new one, the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak (1469–1539) never intended to found a new religion. There were already too many religions, he believed, and his solution was to try to negate the difference between Hinduism and Islam: there is no Hindu, and there is no Muslim (Uberoi 1996: 61). His message was 'a common language', and his aim was to arrive at the truth, which is the unity of God, for Hindus and Muslims alike (ibid.: 62). This agenda does not sound very different from that of Akbar, "the supposedly liberal emperor" (ibid.: 76), who, by his persecution of Sikhs, confirms that similarity breeds competition, in this case violent suppression, and that peaceful integration is sometimes more easily achieved by means of difference.

In 1715, a British mission from Calcutta to Delhi witnessed mass executions of Sikhs. The Sikhs reacted to persecution with fervour, passion, and the quest for martyrdom. They

> "vied with one another for precedence in death. (…) While the executions were in progress, the mother of one of the prisoners, a young man just arrived at manhood (…) pleaded the cause of her son before the [Moghul] Emperor. [The latter] pitied the woman and [issued] orders to release the youth. She arrived with the order of release just as the executioner was standing with his bloody sword upheld over the young man's head. When she showed the imperial order the youth broke out into complaints, saying, 'My mother speaketh falsely: I with heart and soul join my fellow-believers in devotion to the Guru: send me quickly after my companions.' Needless to say his request was cheerfully granted." (Uberoi [1996: 97f.] citing Macauliffe 1909)

The Moghuls may have shown kind interest in religious ideas from far and wide, from Gnosticism to Buddhism, but when it came to a rival unifying religious project, which was thriving in their own domain, they displayed no leniency.

Synthetic religions always fail. Akbar's compromise religion, *Din-ul-Lah*, is long forgotten. Sikhism is still around and has millions of followers, but it failed as a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. Rather than unifying the two it became a third religion.

The Ottoman Empire and Colonial Sudan

Another multi-ethnic empire with a Muslim ruling elite was the Ottoman Empire with its *millet* system. Arguably, comparative research on the *convivencia* – the period of Muslim rule in Spain and the topic of the conference where the first version of this paper was presented – should include the Ottoman Empire as the closest parallel outside Spain. Besides displaying many parallels with the *convivencia*, the Ottoman Empire also represents a continuation of *convivencia* in the history of some population groups: Spanish Jews ended up as Ottoman subjects in Turkey, and Spanish Muslims became Ottoman subjects in North Africa.

My personal experience of the post-Ottoman world is limited to the Sudan, which is somewhat marginal in Ottoman history. As a remote province of Egypt, the Sudan was the periphery of a

periphery. Rather than being under the direct control of Istanbul, the imperial capital, Egypt was a power centre in its own right. As a part of the Empire, it seemed, at times, to be a satellite on a distant circuit. At other times, however, Istanbul and Egypt came all too close to each other and clashed on hostile terms. We will return to Egypt and the Sudan after starting our account at the centre.

Historical scholarship about the Ottoman Empire focuses on the core land, the Balkans and Anatolia, and to some extent the Levante and Iraq come in. Religious and ethnic plurality was built into the Ottoman Empire from the start. The core of the Ottoman Empire coincided precisely with the core of the Byzantine Empire, a Christian empire, the eastern Rome, which had managed to survive its western counterpart by a thousand years.[21] Before and after the conquest of Constantinople, alliances, employment, and trade had spanned the Muslim/Christian divide. Once established in the imperial capital, the Ottomans perceived themselves as heirs to an empire, "*Rum*", in a way reminiscent of the Franks in the west. Barkey writes about this early phase as follows: "Under conditions of rapid expansion and lack of adequate manpower, the state that was constructed was necessarily a hybrid one in which Christians were as necessary and welcome as Muslims". (Barkey 2008: 32) There was no room for rigid or intolerant versions of Islam.[22] Despite occasional outbreaks of communal violence and the relatively rare application of state violence, long-term processes of negotiation and accommodation among religious communities seem to have resulted in a division of labour, which, though not free of hierarchical elements (political rule and military power were in Muslim hands), opened alternative routes of advancement to Christians and Jews. As payers of special taxes, Christians and Jews were given the opportunity to become economically successful. To keep or to make them poor would have been detrimental for state revenue.

Barkey's book, on which my discussion of the Ottoman Empire is largely based, bears the title *Empire of Difference: the Ottomans in comparative perspective*. She compares the Ottoman Empire not only to its predecessors, Rome and Byzantium, but also and especially to the contemporaneous empires of the Habsburgs and the Romanovs. Each had to find arrangements for ethnically and religiously heterogeneous populations, and each had its special way of going about it. Barkey hardly mentions Spain, but there is an implicit comparison with medieval Spain in her characterisation of interreligious relationships in the Ottoman Empire as "convivencia" (Barkey 2008: 280).

Barkey's procedure, one might note, differs from that of Foltz, to whom I refer in the preceding section about the Moghuls. By describing the continuity of the Ottoman Empire with the Roman Empire, including *Rum*, i.e. Byzantium, she does what historians mostly do: She stays in a region and describes a succession of regimes. And, in comparing the Ottomans with the Habsburgs and the Romanovs, she leaves the region but stays in the same period.[23] In contrast, the preceding section on the Moghuls restricts itself neither to a fixed regional framework nor to a fixed historical

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[21] Retrospectively, and seen with 'Western' eyes, both Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire have become proverbial for their social pathologies, e.g. the 'Byzantine court intrigues' and the prolonged decline and corruption of 'the sick man on the Bosporus'. Western Europeans who use this type of language, however, should not forget that most of them live in states that have not yet managed to exist nearly as long as either of the two. Both seem to have had remarkable integrative force and to have managed quite well as empires. Time has come to analyse them as success stories and to inquire into the reasons of their success.

[22] On "Purity and Power in Islamic and Non-Islamic Societies" in a different comparative framework, starting from northeast African examples, see chapter 10 in Schlee (2008).

[23] Another promising comparison is that between the ethnic policies of Russia and China in different periods (Schorkowitz, forthcoming).

period. Instead, it traces the ancestry of a regime across a continent, having comparatively little to say about India before and after the Moghuls or about contemporaneous empires elsewhere. Both accounts, however, resemble each other in discussing the relevant models of the regimes in question: Rome and Byzantium served as models for the Ottomans, just as Chinggis Khan and Timur Leng did for the Moghuls.

As we have discussed tax farming in the Moghul Empire, it might be of comparative interest to see how taxes were collected in the Ottoman Empire. Here, direct taxation by the state administration and tax farming co-existed as parallel systems. Both had advantages. Only in the case of direct taxation could the state fine-tune taxes to changes in the productivity of an area, thus reaping the benefits of good development policy. However, the substantial down payments that were obtained, mostly in addition to annual fees, when tax farms were allocated, were quite attractive when the state was short of money, which it often was, due to wars being fought on its frontiers. Before the eighteenth century, tax farming contracts were often short-term, being allocated to the highest bidder, and thus subject to a relatively flexible and responsive market mechanism. During the nineteenth century, however, long-term allocations, often for life, became more and more common (Barkey 2008: 230). Contracts were mostly extended to members of a privileged group of high-level officers and patrons in Istanbul, and the stability of these contracts furthered the development of independent and competitive pasha and vizier households (ibid.: 233). By privileging this particular military class, however, the state solidified its links to it (ibid.: 236), thus counteracting, to some extent, the centrifugal tendency inherent in tax farming.

There are more comparative points to be made about the relative advantages of direct taxation by the state bureaucracy over tax farming. Taxes can only be used for politics – for example, by lowering them or by using them to fund popular projects – if they are under direct control of the political leadership. In Basra, the Ottomans relieved local populations from the heavy tax burden imposed by the Safavids "to demonstrate the benefits of association with the Ottoman Empire" (ibid.: 92). In the Hijaz, the Ottomans spent funds gathered through taxation in maintaining and provisioning the Holy cities. One possible explanation for the swift expansion of Islamic rule over Christian populations in the eighth and ninth centuries is that Islamic rulers imposed lower taxes than their Christian predecessors had. Historiography, however, tends to focus on battles rather than on softer technologies of power.

High-ranking Sunni Muslims, that is, members of this state class, were not the only ones involved in the tax farming business. Greek, Armenian, and Jewish bankers often helped to finance the purchase of tax farms and, as creditors of the tax farmers, had an interest in it. Some tax farms were subdivided in many small shares or were split into parts held by subcontractors (ibid.: 234). All this limits the potential of tax farmers to become lords in their own right by defection from the central government, although rich families often combined tax farming with substantial land holdings of their own and other sources of wealth and power.

Although a secure legal status was granted to Christians, albeit as citizens with limited rights, many Christians still chose to join the mainstream of imperial society by converting to Islam. On the eastern side of Anatolia's Black Sea shore, the district of Of provides an example of the extent to which this happened. This district was famous for its many religious specialists and its level of sophistication in Islamic law. Centres of Islamic learning

"were especially concentrated in the upper western valley, where Greek was more commonly spoken than Turkish. Sermons were delivered in Turkish, but also commonly in Greek (in each instance with Koranic citations in Arabic). Koranic texts were discussed in Turkish, but also commonly in Greek." (Meeker 2002: 165)

The *khutba* in Greek! *Tafsir* in Greek! Greek as a language of Islamic learning? Why not! This resonates well with Bellér-Hann's (2008: 20) finding, with reference to the wider 'Turkic speaking world', "that language is not necessarily the most important criterion of identity."[24] For his northeast Anatolian research area, Meeker describes how an imperial nation developed out of diverse ethnic origins in Ottoman times and persisted into the modern Turkish nation state, with certain Ottoman, rather than Kemalist features: "Today, in the eastern Black Sea provinces of Turkey, from Artvin to Ordu, the traces of ethnicity, Lazi, Armenian, Greek, and Turkic, are easy to discover in language, stories, customs, and dress. And yet, in contrast to all these differences, the inhabitants of the rural societies still lack a strong interest in their parochial backgrounds and traditions. With the exception of a few recent authors and books, there is no developed culture of ethnicity in the eastern coastal region. Instead, social manners and relations are more or less homogenous at a certain level, a direct reflection of a local engagement in wider market and state systems, now national as once before imperial." (Meeker 2002: 108 f.)

Meeker focuses on Agha families, i.e. on the families of local dignitaries, which look as if they might be descended from earlier tribal chiefs who were co-opted into the imperial elite. But the actual history is much more complex. At least some of the founders of these distinct patrilines were, initially, officials appointed by the imperial state, without a local power base. Once in place, they forged commercial partnerships and political alliances that gave them a base of power beyond their period of appointment. In this way, they managed to secure a privileged position for their descendants. What might thus at first glance appear to be ruling lines of local tribes are actually somewhat tribalised elements of bureaucracy – a reminder that what appears to be tribal is not always older than the trappings of the modern state (ibid.: 202 ff.).[25]

This part of Anatolia, which was not located at the real periphery of the Ottoman Empire but belonged to the outer layer of its core, displayed features typical of imperial society but was not always under the full control of the Sublime Porte. Under these conditions, local bases of power could arise, as the activities of an Agha from this region indicate:

"He was somehow involved in the manufacturing and shipping of flax and linen (…). He advanced villagers cash for their future produce so that they might be able to make tax payments. He collected funds to be forwarded as tax receipts to the provincial governor, taking some varying share for himself in proportion to his own position of strength. He was then, all at once, a social oligarch, an entrepreneur, a moneylender, a tax-collector, and, eventually, a provincial state official." (Meeker 2002: 214)

In its core lands, the Ottoman Empire exercised mostly direct forms of rule; but, as Meeker's findings in eastern Anatolia show, the central state increasingly had to find accommodations with local powers as we move to the outer layers of the core and towards the periphery. The further we move in that direction, the more indirect the forms of rule become, as can be illustrated with reference to the literature on Syria.

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[24] For a brief typology of relations between language and collective identities in a yet wider framework, see Schlee (2009: 99–103).
[25] For a recent study of the interpenetration of patrilineal descent and clientelism in a quite different part of the Turkic world, Kyrgyzstan, see Ismailbekova (2012).

Lewis characterises Ottoman rule in Syria in the early nineteenth century as ineffective. "Ottoman forces were weak and hardly contributed to the safety of the countryside" (Lewis 2000: 33). Power was bipolar. In the towns, there were garrisons and administrations and taxes were collected as far as their power extended. The desert and steppe rangelands were the domain of Bedouin tribes, which raided trading caravans, each other, and the peasant villages around the towns. Weaker tribes could buy "brotherliness" (*khuwwa*) from stronger tribes. That was the way out of the raiding economy. When the power of the town expanded, people of a wider area had to pay taxes. When the power of the Bedouin expanded, also peasants, villagers, and townspeople had to pay *khuwwa*: a constantly shifting boundary between two modes of extraction (Toth 2006: 49–50).

The Bedouin resisted taxation and conscription, but did not mind to fulfil military tasks under the command of their own leaders. The government paid Bedouin for the protection of the *hajj* caravan and for other tasks. Whether this was payment for a service or a tribute to a force that was perceived as a threat, may be a question which can only be answered on a case by case basis taking into account the power differentials at a given moment. Often, town (=state) power could only be extended to the countryside with Bedouin help, by deals which required "mutual recognition" of the sedentary and the nomad power.

> "Tribal shaykhs would agree to such concessions as the payment of taxes, supplying fighters or camels, and agreeing to maintain security in the *bādiya*, usually against other tribes. At the same time, local authorities would present the shaykhs with semi-official titles, and acknowledge their position with payments of cash and gifts of honor such as robes, weapons and horses." (Toth 2006: 57)

Although population increased, agriculture expanded, the sedentary sector of society grew, and statehood became stronger throughout the nineteenth century, Bedouin counterpower remained a factor to reckon with. When the French took over from the Ottomans, they first treated the Bedouins as 'a state within the state'. Later it took massive incentives in the form of private land titles, seats in Parliament, educational grants and straight cash payments to make the Bedouin sheikhs give up some of their powers (Chatty 2006: 739 – 740).

There are, however, no neat geographical divisions among the areas where different forms of taxation prevailed. In some areas close to the core of the empire, pre-Ottoman structures were maintained. "Overall, in the southern Balkans and the Aegean islands of the Greek archipelago, the imperial government relied on the Byzantine and local Christians to perform administrative tasks" (Barkey 2008: 89). "It is not surprising, therefore, that the tax system of Ottoman Anatolia and the Balkans was complex and mixed, and that scholars found elements of Islamic, Mongol, Byzantine, Armenian and Slavic tax systems in the record." (Barkey 2008: 89) Leaders of local communities, rather than the Ottoman bureaucracy or tax farmers, were given government tasks and if they were "embroiled in violence and could not maintain calm in communities and across communities, or […] were unable to garner enough authority to collect taxes, [they] lost their livelihoods and, more often their heads." (ibid.: 147)

My own research in the former Southern fringe of the Ottoman Empire is largely restricted to present-day society but must, necessarily, be situated in a historical context to which I now turn. Much of what is now the Sudan was conquered in 1820/21 by the viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, and stayed under Egyptian rule until the Mahdist period (1881–1898).

In 1841, the Sublime Porte recognised Muhammad Ali as personal ruler for life of Nubia, Darfur, Kordofan, and Sennar – that is roughly the territory that was to become the Sudan. Thus, the ruler of Egypt, an Ottoman dependency, was, in another function, an independent ruler of territories outside the Ottoman Empire. This, however, did not preclude the payment of tribute by the Sudan to Egypt (Gray 1961: 3). In other words, as a sovereign ruler of the Sudan, Muhammad Ali paid tribute to himself in his other capacity as an appointed (but periodically rather unruly) ruler of Egypt, that is as an Ottoman functionary.[26] The Mahdist period ended when the Sudan was occupied, nominally, by Egypt but, actually, by a largely British force. The Sudan then was an Anglo-Egyptian 'condominium' (1898–1956), in which Egypt was clearly the junior partner. Both periods, the Egyptian rule before the Mahdiyya and the Anglo-Egyptian rule after it, are known as the 'Turkish' periods – *turkiyya as-saabiqa*, "the Turkish rule preceding [the Mahdiyya]", and *turkiyya at-taaliya*, "the Turkish rule following [the Mahdiyya]". In the earlier period, this term was justified by the nominal affiliation Egypt still had to the Ottoman Empire; and, at that time, much of the military personnel actually came from Albania, Bosnia, or the Caucasus. In the twentieth century, however, 'Turk' had just become the habitual term for light-skinned foreigners who had come to rule. It is, to my knowledge, the only setting in which Englishmen were popularly known as 'Turks'.

Nineteenth-century Egypt was a modernising regional power, originally with imperial designs of its own; but it later became highly indebted, internationally, and ended up as a British semi-colony. From the beginning, European officers in Egyptian service were key figures in the exercise. In 1820, the first expedition force led by Ismail Pasha, the son of Muhammad Ali, was accompanied by at least three European archaeologists and a renegade American who later joined the conquering army as an officer (Holt and Daly 2000: 43). They were surprised to find other whites: Bosnians who manned Mameluk garrisons, which had been established earlier in the Sudan. Among the first governors appointed after the conquest were a Circassian (ibid.: 51) and a Kurd (ibid.: 53). *Muᶜallim* ('teacher') was the title of Coptic Christian and Jewish administrative officials who took up their posts in the pacified areas (ibid.: 47).

There were some English among the officers who served the Ottoman/Egyptian regime in the Sudan, the best known among them being General Charles Gordon, 'Gordon Pasha', who died a soldier's death when Khartoum fell to the Mahdists in 1885. Other officers of European origin included Rudolf Slatin (still locally known as *Salatiin Baasha*, i.e. Pasha), an Austrian, and the Italian Romolo Gessi, to name just a few. Some of these international careers of the nineteenth century are not unlike those of modern development experts in their wide geographical range and the number of different appointments. The difference is that many of these nineteenth-century figures, from a European perspective, were discoverers and first explorers of the unknown parts of the globe. They wrote thick travelogues and autobiographies to meet the demands of an avid readership. To illustrate this type of career, I turn to Eduard Schnitzer, a.k.a. Emin Pasha. He was born in Oppeln, Silesia, in 1840 to a Jewish family. After the death of his father in 1845, his mother

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[26] The situation reminds me of my native Holstein. From 1559 to 1864, Holstein belonged to the Danish king without belonging to Denmark. As a person, the King of Denmark was simultaneously Count of Holstein, which, until 1806, was nominally a part of the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation' (which was then dissolved by Napoleon). I find this example to be quite illustrative and have never understood why the Schleswig-Holstein question has almost become proverbial for a complicated issue. Compare the famous quotation of the British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerstone: "Only three people understood the Schleswig-Holstein question. The first was Albert, the Prince consort and he is dead; the second is a German professor, and he is in an asylum; and the third was myself – and I have forgotten it." (www.everything2.com/title/schleswig-Holstein+question, accessed September 15, 2009)

remarried and her children were baptised and raised as Protestants. After medical training, Schnitzer first entered Ottoman service in Albania. He turned up in Khartoum in 1876, practising as a medical doctor. By then, he had converted to Islam, at least nominally, and begun to use the name Mehmet Emin or, in Arabic, Muhammad Amin. Gordon made him a medical officer in the southern province of Equatoria, and later the Khedive of Egypt appointed him governor of that province.

Among the many European officers working during the first *turkiyya* period in the Sudan, Emin Pasha, a German, was probably one of the most Ottoman personalities. After all he spoke Turkish, Albanian, and a number of Slavic languages that he had acquired earlier in his career in the European part of the empire. That he also spoke Arabic goes without saying. Apparently, he picked up languages in no time. Gordon appreciated him for his fluency in Luganda,[27] which was useful in the part of Equatoria that extended into what is now Uganda. Emin Pasha also differed from other European officers in having converted to Islam, which was by no means a prerequisite for entering Ottoman service. He possibly did so for his civilian career as a doctor. Marriage is another possible explanation.[28]

Medical doctors of that period included some notorious characters. One French doctor made a flourishing business of castrating slave boys to be sold as eunuchs in Egypt. His surgical skills were worth the fee, because he significantly reduced the mortality this valuable merchandise suffered when undergoing the adjustment to market needs.[29]

The Ottoman Empire, like Tsarist Russia, offered abundant employment opportunities to Western experts. There are, however, a number of reasons why the Sudan, from a British perspective, could not just be regarded as the colony of another country (Egypt, or in terms of wider allegiance, Ottoman Turkey). Britain too had an agenda in the region, and British officers in Egyptian/Ottoman service certainly needed to combine two loyalties.

For the British, Egypt became increasingly important as a provider of cotton as a consequence of the embargo imposed by the Confederate States during the American Civil War (1861–1865). What is more, the newly opened Suez Canal (1869) was of great strategic importance for British India. And in imperialist dreams, many Britons saw everything on the map, "From Cape to Cairo", coloured in British red. For these and other reasons, the Sudan, though nominally Ottoman, was regarded by the British as part of their sphere of interest.

In a way, the British position in the nineteenth-century Sudan can be compared to their position in seventeenth-century Bengal. In Bengal, as Parsons (2010: 171) has pointed out, the British were the 'vassals' of Murshid Quli Khan, who, though officially a retainer of the Great Moghul in Dehli, was de-facto an independent ruler. In a similar way, the British in the Sudan were somewhat indirect vassals of the Sublime Porte. They stood in the service of the ruler of Egypt, who pledged allegiance to the Ottoman Empire, at least nominally. Thus, though the British became a colonial

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[27] Cf. Wikipedia: Emin Pasha (accessed May 21, 2009).

[28] With reference to 1888, Mounteney-Jephson (1891: 60) writes that "some years before, the Pasha had married an Abyssinian lady". He became a widower at the birth of the second and only surviving child, a daughter named Farida. Nothing is reported about the religion of the mother or the kind of marriage ceremony. As an 'Abyssinian', Emin's wife may have been of Christian origin.

[29] The castration of slave boys is an interesting although somewhat gruesome example of religious division of labour. Castration – of humans and non-humans alike, since this also applies to domestic animals – is forbidden for Muslims. Yet, the demand for eunuchs in Egypt and other parts of the Ottoman Empire was high. The buyers of eunuchs were exclusively Muslims. To satisfy their demand, non-Muslims were needed. Here Christians came in, namely the Copts of Upper Egypt, in particular their priests and monks who were famous for their medical skills (Meinardus 1969; Mowafi 1981: 16).

power in their own right, they must also be viewed, within the very same period, as one of the many ethnic groups that was ruled by the empires of others. After their decline as a colonial power in the Americas, the British were still on the rise as a colonial power in other parts of the world, where, initially, they had sometimes acted as agents of other empires.

The loss of the Sudan to the Mahdi, beginning in 1881 and culminating in the fall of Khartoum in 1885, was a serious setback and left an open wound in the British national soul. It was perceived as a humiliation, which was not avenged until 14 years later, in 1898, when a combined British and Egyptian force advanced into the Sudan. The decisive battle was at Omdurman, readers may know from the famous account in Winston Churchill's *My Early Life*.[30] The conquest initiated a period known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan or the condominium (1898–1956).

The legal justification for the conquest was the reinstallation of legitimate pre-*Mahdiyya* rule. So, at least nominally, the British acted in the name of Egypt, which, in turn, was still nominally affiliated to the Ottoman Empire.[31] This, however, is a rather theoretical consideration. In practice, this remote affiliation did not instil any sense of loyalty in British officers. By the time the Ottoman empire joined the Central Powers, Germany and Austria, in World War I, and Britain reacted by claiming Egypt and the Sudan for herself, a long relationship of mutual support had already cooled down. Britain and Ottoman Turkey, allies in re-taking Egypt from Napoleonic forces (1801) and allies in the Crimean war (1853), were now at war with each other after a shift of alliances. For a long time, Ottoman Turkey had received British support against stronger European empires such as Russia and Austria-Hungary as part of the British 'balance of power' politics.

Returning to the Sudan from this more global context, we now address the issue of how cultural, linguistic, or religious differences were handled by two administrations, the *turkiyya* before and the *turkiyya* after the Mahdi Period. In the earlier administration, from 1821 to 1881, Kurds, Albanians, Circassians, English, Austrians, and Italians all ruled the Sudan in the name of Egypt, and Egypt, at least nominally, was an Ottoman dependency. Neither '*turkiyya*' nor 'Egyptian' is an adequate name for this rule. Modern ethnic labels are misleading. Holt (1961: 37) clarifies that

> "(…) to speak of the 'Egyptian conquest' is liable to call up anachronistic associations. The Arabic-speaking Egyptian nation-state with its national army did not then exist: the government of the Ottoman province of Egypt was in the hand of Turkish-speaking Ottoman subjects, a ruling *élite* linked by a complicated web of ties to the Arabic-speaking population."

The Ottoman Empire, including Egypt, in spite of all the criticism of Europeans about its backwardness, comprised an element of modernisation and globalisation. As in the present age, and in contrast to the more nationalist age lying between us and the modernising empires of the nineteenth century, there was a competition for the best brains from far and wide, irrespective of ethnic or religious background. The 'sick man on the Bosporus', as the critics called the Ottoman Empire, was not as sick as it/he was said to be. There was a great deal of corruption, but there were also strong forces for reform. After all, some of the Ottoman Empire's most vociferous critics were themselves on the imperial payroll. Among the governors and in the international corps of military

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[30] This account contains some imprecisions when it comes to the Sudan, but it gives a very vivid image of the attitudes of a young member of the English warrior aristocracy.

[31] Formally, this relationship ended only when the British declared war against the Ottoman Empire in World War I. They then annexed Egypt and the Sudan. Egypt was unilaterally (by the British!) declared independent in 1922. The *Khedive,* an Ottoman appointee (at least in theory – actual power relations were changeable), thereby became "King" of Egypt (Woodward 1990: 17).

officers and civilian administrators, there was certainly a strong element of pluralism; but this pluralism represented less a mosaic of groups than a great diversity of individual origins.

Looking at local forces, we find a different kind of pluralism. Often, local notables were simply confirmed or co-opted as rulers, and groups were incorporated with their internal structures left largely intact. Here, a few examples can be given of this form of incorporation at the group level – examples which we take from the period of the governor Khurshid.

After fighting against the Greek struggle for independence, ʿAli Khurshid Agha became governor of the Sudan in 1826 (Holt and Daly 2000: 52). He offered amnesty to those inhabitants of the Nile valley who had fought the army of conquest and taken refuge in remote areas like the hills of the Ethiopian borderlands. This helped in re-populating the villages in the fertile Nile Valley and, thus, in increasing state revenues. The Jaʿali sheikh Idris wad ʿAdlan accepted Khurshid's offer of amnesty and was even recognised by him as sheikh of the Funj Mountains. To gain the support of local notables and religious leaders, Khurshid exempted them from taxation. The ʿArakiyyin sheikh, Ahmad ar-Rayyah, was among those persuaded. He led thousands of people back to their villages along the Blue Nile. Khurshid's kind invitations were accompanied by the threat to kill all those who did not submit (ibid.: 53 f.).

In this, the holders of high office in the Ottoman Empire did not differ from conquering kings in antiquity or in medieval Europe, who often simply accepted the rulers of conquered groups as vassals. One reason for this may have been that, in such cases, to impose an alien administration would have been prohibitively costly. One may also view this system as a precursor of 'Indirect Rule', the official ideology of British rule throughout Africa, which would be applied to the Sudan in the Anglo-Egyptian period.

Whether applied in an orthodox fashion or in one of its many local applications or deviations, Indirect Rule, in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan as elsewhere, was based on the assumption that the rulers and the ruled were substantively different groups. This certainly violates modern ideas of equality, although it resonates with other modern ideas, such as 'indigenism' and 'multiculturalism', which also allocate different rights to different groups. Indirect Rule has often been decried as a particularly perfidious trick of the colonialists, and 'colonialism' has long joined 'sin' as a member of the category of things one has to be against. All this makes it difficult to adopt an analytical attitude toward it, without exposing oneself of moral criticism. I am not going to expose myself to the wrath of all 'good' people by defending colonialism. Colonialism was not the purely humanitarian enterprise that it was portrayed to be by some colonialists. And still, one cannot deny the humanitarian motivation and the deep sense of duty on the part of many individual colonial officers. Noble motives were mixed with attitudes that appear very strange to us today, such as a clear sense of superiority and paternalistic or even racialist attitudes (Deng and Daly 1989). I will not attempt a moral evaluation of colonialism; but, whatever else one might say about British rule in the Sudan, even the sternest critic would have to admit that some aspects of it look quite clever and that, on the whole, British rule was less brutal than much of what took place before and after the British. Let us hear a Sudanese voice:

> "One has to admit that the British administration was able to understand the Sudanese mentality in a very astonishing way, and that they skilfully administrated the country for more than 50 years and paralysed any organized national resistance until the end of the forties. They manipulated the influence of the local religious and political leadership and cooperated with the two groups as a counterbalanced group to control any independent

domination of one group over the other or any attempt to defy the government." (Ibrahim 1979: 19)

Hayder Ibrahim sees the necessity for "some kind of simple autonomy in which the local leaders, notables, and religious men administered the region in the name of the central government" and stresses that it had never been possible to administer this vast and heterogeneous country by other means (ibid.: 19).

Modern historians are very sceptical of Indirect Rule. They join the educated elites of the ex-colonies in describing it as a device to keep the new elites, the products of modern education, out of power. Power was based on a collusion between foreign colonialist and "traditional" authorities. With reference to the Sudan, Daly (1991: 5) says that Indirect Rule had its heyday in the decade after 1924. It was based "upon inexact comparisons with Northern Nigeria and on the pseudo-scientific prescriptions of Lord Lugard."

Lord Lugard and Indirect Rule

As a colonial administrator, Lord Lugard is only a marginal figure in Sudanese history. His importance is greater in Ugandan history. As an employee of the British East Africa Company, he was very vocal in demanding the colonisation of Uganda, with the result that plans to abandon that territory were revised. The Mahdists were pushed out of Wadelai, Emin Pasha's earlier headquarter on the Albert Nile, in the 1890s. (Moorehead 1973 [1960]: 322) Since then, the boundary between Sudan and Uganda has shifted repeatedly.

Lord Lugard's most important impact on Sudanese history was through his writings, especially through his book *The Dual Mandate*, which presents the model of administration he later developed as a governor of Nigeria. First published in 1922, this book has appeared in many editions since then. It turned out to be the handbook of British colonialism in Africa, closely associated with the concept of Indirect Rule.

Both Direct and Indirect Rule had been tried before in India. There, some territories were administered directly,[32] while, in others, local princes were left in their positions and co-opted into the colonial administration. In northern Nigeria, the Hausa states were incorporated in accordance with the second model, that of Indirect Rule. Much of Lugard's language has a progressive ring.

> "The British Empire (…) has only one mission – for liberty and self-development on no standardised lines, so that all may feel that their interests and religion are safe under the British flag. Such liberty and self-development can be best secured to the native population by leaving them free to manage their own affairs through their own rulers (…)." (Lugard 1965 [1922]: 94)

Then, however, Lugard introduces the idea of 'advancement'. Different populations have 'advanced' on the path of development, reaching different stages, Lugard thought, in agreement with the evolutionist and modernist ideas that were unquestioned in his day. They need more guidance, or they need less, and the ultimate arbiters of such needs are the British. The passage quoted above continues as follows: "(…) proportionately to their degree of advancement, under the guidance of the British staff, and subject to the laws and policy of the administration" (ibid.: 94).

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[32] As in Africa, administration in India was first in the hands of a company, the East India Company, and only later in the hands of the Colonial Office.

Appeals to "liberty" and "self-development" were not meant to imply that all people should mix freely; rather, developing along one's own lines required separation. One is reminded of the *apartheid* regime in South Africa, which, decades later, also combined a liberal language of cultural group rights, not unlike multiculturalism, with rigid racial segregation.

As a typical representative of the first half of the twentieth century, Lugard was racialist to the bone. In his view, different groups had merits, capabilities and achievements, but only as long as they remained separate. "In matters social and racial", he argued, "absolute equality" was possible among representatives of diverse races, if they followed "a separate path, each pursuing his own inherited traditions, preserving his own race-purity and race-pride; equality in things spiritual, agreed divergence in the physical and material" (ibid.: 87). In other words, one should respect Africans as a different kind of beings but not socialise with them and by no means beget mixed children with them. The heading on the page that I am citing reads, "NO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION". I am sure that Lugard was convinced subjectively that he was not preaching or practicing racial discrimination. From a present-day perspective, we must be allowed to disagree. In Lugard and his contemporaries, however, this sort of racism was so deeply ingrained that it went unnoticed and unquestioned.

Lugard viewed Europeanised Africans – that is, the products of the schools that the colonial powers and the missionaries preceding and following them had introduced – as undesirable elements that blurred these distinctions. They are not suitable for employment, because they cannot mediate between Europeans and uneducated Africans. "The Europeanised African is indeed separated from the rest of the people by a gulf which no racial affinity can bridge" (ibid.: 81). True to his racialist perspective, Lugard (ibid.: 80) regards people he dislikes, in this case educated Africans, as biologically inferior.

> "The Europeanised African differs not merely in mental outlook from the other groups, but also in physique. Doctors and dentists tell us that he has become less fertile, more susceptible to lung-trouble and to other diseases, and to defective dentition – disabilities which have probably arisen from in-breeding among a very limited class, and to the adoption of European dress, which writers in the native press say is enervating and inimical to the health of the African."

As Lugard was writing about the first generation of educated Africans, it is hard to imagine how they could have fallen victim to "in-breeding". These racialising ramblings must have stretched the logic even of the readers in the 1920s, when *The Dual Mandate* was first published, to the extreme, although they were used to much higher doses of racism than we are now. Also, in later decades, educated Africans have probably intermarried with a wider range of people, ethnically and geographically, than uneducated ones – an observation that reduces Lugard's argument to pure fantasy.

While Africans who had been exposed to European curricula were not favoured by Lugard and his policies, traditional Muslim rulers clearly were. The resulting advancement of Islam was not due to Lugard's sympathies for this religion or for any other religion, for that matter. Rather, he viewed Islam as a necessary evil, and his tolerance of it was a by-product of Indirect Rule.

> "Both the Arabs in the east and the Fulani in the west are Mohamedans, and by supporting their rule we unavoidably encourage the spread of Islam, which from the purely administrative point of view has the disadvantage of being subject to waves of fanaticism, bounded by no political frontiers" (ibid.: 210)

Still, aspects of Islam were found useful. These included "well understood powers of Wakils (…)", "educational advantages" and the Muslims' "advanced method of disposing justice." (Lugard 1956 [1922]: 204)

Missionary interference with Islam was therefore undesirable. Generally, Lugard described missionaries, their schools, the expectations they raised, the image of Europeans they conveyed and their zeal and divisive preaching quite negatively. Indirect Rule was based on group differences, not on conversion and assimilation.

This anti-assimilationist element of Indirect Rule can be seen as a kind of allergy that British agents of Church and State had developed against their own product. Indirect Rule was established after long periods of conversion and assimilation, during which Europeanised Africans had often been highly regarded and employed as allies of their colonial masters – or, in cases where this development preceded the establishment of formal rule, their future colonial masters. Later, these Europeanised, 'trousered' Africans were rejected, largely because they were perceived as being (dangerously) close to their European masters (a case of sameness rather than difference leading to conflict). They were often ridiculed as fake Europeans, both in Europe and 'back home'. Gradually, then, in securing African allies, the British replaced Europeanised Africans with traditional rulers.[33]

Accommodating traditional authorities and local practices of law and respecting local customs was not just a British reaction against 'Europeanised' Africans. It was a necessity from the beginning. Europeans were spread thin on the ground. In Kenya they were often assisted by Goan clerks, in the Sudan by Egyptians. But, even with these allies, Europeans were never strong enough to rule alone, without regard for the ideas of rule and the social forms created by their subjects. So, Indirect Rule was not just a manipulative instrument imposed from the top down. It was a way to accommodate real power, local power, which had been there before, no matter how much it changed in the process of integration into new forms of statehood.

If one half of power stems from the rulers (their superior military technology and their effective administration), the other half stems from the ruled. They have to accept their rulers at some point, and the rulers have to seek their acceptance, because continuous violent oppression is too expensive in the long run. (Spear 2003) The need to accommodate existing powers sometimes made unlikely bedfellows. Christian rulers (who, by the twentieth century, may often have been enlightened, secularised, and modernist, i.e. 'soft' Christians anyhow) often felt closer to their Muslim partners in the arrangements of Indirect Rule, than to Christian missionaries.

In thinking about the attitudes of European powers toward Islam, one should bear in mind that there is a radical difference between our vantage point at the beginning of the twenty-first century and the time we are dealing with in the preceding paragraphs, the early twentieth century. While European countries are now bending backwards to please the Americans in their "war on terror" and in fighting the "Islamist threat",[34] a century ago, Britain and Germany were competing with each other for the hearts of Muslims. Germany was in alliance with the Ottoman sultan, the *khaliifa*, the successor of the Prophet; and the British Empire was depended on the consent of the

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[33] I owe these considerations, which seem to apply to much of British rule in Africa, to Jacqueline Knörr (personal communication), who was thinking, primarily, of the Upper Guinea Coast. On educated Africans who speak European languages or a European-language based Creole and on the "lack of indigeneity and ethnic authenticity" (Knörr 2010: 745) of which they are often accused in colonial and post-colonial power games, see also Cohen (1981), the by now classic reference.

[34] See Schlee (2008: 107–169) for some of the paradoxical effects of the 'war on terror' and the fight against the 'Islamist threat' in Somalia.

many Muslim peoples it accommodated. It is therefore no surprise that Lord Lugard perceived World War I as the crucial test of Indirect Rule by means of Muslim notables.

> "The war, however, put the system to a crucial test. It was well known that Britain was fighting against Turkey, a Muslim State with whom the Senussi, whose emissaries from Tripoli find easy access to Nigeria, was in active alliance. A great rising took place in the vast regions under French rule bordering Nigeria to the north. Reports, fully credited by the French themselves, reached the country that Agades – the desert capital—had fallen before a Muslim army well equipped with cannon. Hostile forces were said to be rapidly advancing towards Sokoto. The French asked our assistance. Half of our own forces, and most of the officers known to the natives, had already gone to East Africa [to fight the Germans]. But not for a moment there was the slightest doubt of the loyalty of the Emirs. The garrison of Kano itself was withdrawn, and replaced by police. Sokoto and Katsena, the border States, were eager to raise native levies to assist.
> Each year of the war the native treasuries offered £50,000 towards its cost. The last year they submitted £11,000 to the Red Cross Fund – the Sultan of Sokoto preferring that he and his chiefs should subscribe from their private means for such a purpose rather than from the public treasury. Daily prayers in all the mosques were offered for the victory of the King's arms." (Lugard 1965 [1922]: 222 f.)

Conclusions

The presentation of material for comparison has to stop at some point. A description of examples spanning around a quarter of the globe soon runs out of time or out of space. It would have been interesting to observe how the pluriethnic and plurireligious Ottoman Empire ultimately dissolved, under the influence of the Wilsonian model, into independent nation states – and how, in the Balkans, this had been prefigured by the formation of national churches (Hoffmann 2008, 2009).

Although our account of Sudanese history has ended abruptly, Indirect Rule has not. It has endured under the name of Native Administration until now. It has been abolished, reintroduced and reformulated several times since the independence of the Sudan in 1956.

Returning to the themes of sameness and difference as alternative modes of integration, an idea sketched at the beginning of this paper, we may now make a basic distinction in light of our comparative findings. This distinction is between the rulers and the ruled. Among the rulers, sameness is the fundamental mode of integration, but between rulers and the ruled, and among different groups of the ruled, difference is the basis of integration. This may become clearer if we review, briefly, the cases discussed above.

Founders of empires have to transcend tribe and ethnicity to forge a loyal following and a new imperial class. The group that came to be known as the Mongols when they set out to rule the world was in fact already an amalgamation of Turkic, Mongol, and Evenki speakers. Advancement was by loyalty to the ruler and by merit in the sense of usefulness to the ruler, not by virtue of representing a group. Group differences had been erased.

The ruled, however, were left alone as long as they paid tribute. Those who had escaped annihilation could keep their languages and religions. The Mongol rulers even had a friendly interest, as consumers so to speak, in the cultures and religions of their subjects. From their perspective, religious specialists of various origins might be useful for divination and magic,

important techniques for the maintenance of power. The cultures of the subject people were a source of refinement for the Mongol life style.

A similar pattern of de-tribalisation and de-ethnicisation has been found twice again in our historical overview. Timur Leng forged a personal following out of individuals rather than tribes, thus laying the foundations of the military successes of many of his descendants, including the Moghuls in India. The Ottomans, in turn, assimilated Greeks, Serbs, Lazis, and others into the ruling stratum, the imperial class, where loyalties to one's benefactors within that class and networks with other members outweighed memories of diverse ethnic origins. So, in the military class and the ruling elite, we find amalgamation or assimilation as the dominant means of integration. The result of these processes is sameness.

The mode of integration of subject peoples, however – whether they were highly valued, productive, and skilled subjects who needed to be pampered, abject people in serf-like positions, or the inhabitants of slave reservoirs – was based on difference. They were kept out of core military and government functions, even if some became important figures in bureaucracy, trade, or commerce.

Perhaps it was the relative lack of conformity with these basic structures of empire that brought down Moghul rule in India. The Moghuls might not have paid sufficient attention to the assimilation of strangers into the ruling Turko-Persian-Mongol stratum or their exclusion from it altogether. They may have given too much power to unassimilated strangers such as Brahmins and the British, who then dismantled the empire.

Amalgamating the ruling stratum into a culturally homogenous nation of empire, to borrow Meeker's phrase, is an ideal that is achieved to a lesser and lesser degree as we move from the centre to the periphery of empires. Here, often, Indirect Rule *avant la parole* had to be practiced, and here, often, arrangements were made with local elites who were left in place, acting nominally in the name of the centre, but remaining relatively free in practice.

Forms of taxation differed along the same line. Direct taxation was practiced in the core lands of the Ottoman Empire, as far as the arm of the bureaucracy reached. Beyond that there was the belt of tax farming. We have discussed that in the Moghul and the Ottoman cases. Throughout British colonial Africa as well, government-appointed chiefs were tax collectors, who were required to deliver a specific amount but had a lot of discretion in how they collected taxes and what they kept for themselves.

Empires have pedigrees. The Ottoman Empire saw itself as a successor to the Byzantine Empire and, thereby, to Rome. Further west, the Franks understood themselves as Rome's heirs, as did the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation", until Napoleon dissolved it in 1806. The phrase, "pax Britannica",[35] which was modelled on the Roman 'pax Imperica', indicates that the British thought of themselves as Romans of sorts. In a similar way, we could trace traditions of empire and dynastic links from the Moghuls in India back to Tamerlane and Chinggis Khan.

To what extent do these chains of tradition and the concomitant derivation of prestige involve actual transfers of knowledge, law, techniques of rule, or forms of organisation? This question is reminiscent of the old and unresolved debate in anthropology between diffusionists, who always find an earlier model and a connection to it, and those who believe in human inventiveness, assuming that the same devices and procedures have been invented again and again in the course of history. Some transfers among historical empires are, of course, common knowledge. Our law

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[35] See Schlee with Shongolo (2012) for the use of this metaphor in Kenya.

students still learn about Roman Law, which is mirrored in the Islamic world by bodies of law not derived from the *shariᶜa*, including, for example, *qanuun* (canon law) and *baqt* (pactum), the treaty of the Muslims with the Christian kingdoms of Nubia (until the sixteenth century). So, there is also a 'Roman' tradition of law in the Islamic world, and in the Ottoman sphere in particular. I must admit, however, that my reading of the secondary literature does not reveal much beyond these obvious links. It is here that I, as an anthropologist of contemporary Northeast Africa venturing far into the fields of others, come up against my limits. No doubt, there is much evidence to be found, by people better qualified than I, of the transmission of the arts of statecraft among historically related empires.

Before closing, I return briefly to the finding that differences can be a mode of integration. This does not necessarily mean that rulers prefer difference to sameness. The early rulers of the Ottoman Empire might have preferred a purely Muslim population; but Jews and Christians happened to be there, and they were too numerous and economically too strong to be expelled or assimilated. Members of these religious communities may have learned, through an extended historical process, that it was quite profitable for them to maintain and instrumentalise their differences from the rulers. However that may be, the Ottoman Empire came to rest on a basis of interreligious arrangements. In a purely Muslim state, different forms of taxation and different ways of dividing labour would have evolved, and such an entity would have lacked the features we associate with the Ottoman Empire.

If time and space were unlimited, we could pursue our cases to the present. We would then have to listen to sad accounts of massacres and expulsions. Ethnic mixes can be unmixed, and heterogeneous populations can be homogenised by force. Such processes are part of the history of many modern nation states. This, however, should not lead us to idealise or romanticise the pluralism of earlier periods. Systems based on different group rights have a tendency to limit individual freedom. The niche that guarantees survival or even prosperity is hard for outsiders to enter and difficult for insiders to leave. One's role is determined by one's group affiliation. Adhering to a given religion, one also ends up in a certain social role and economic niche; one speaks a particular language and must submit to a certain dress code. To become something else remains forever a dream. Secure and prosperous as they may have been, the non-Muslim groups under Muslim protection were neatly circumscribed with regard to their fields of activity. The ambition of a Christian to get into the inner circle of politics, or the dream of a Jewish boy to become a soldier, could not be realised under this kind of pluralism.

Discourses on difference and policies based on these discourses are a confusing hall of mirrors, often producing distortion. Positions of those who believe themselves to be miles apart on a scale of moral evaluation may be expressed in the same words and have the same consequences. Celebrating group identities may lead to the loss of individual liberties, as pluralism fades into segregation and multiculturalism into apartheid.

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