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tradition**

**Book section**

**Original citation:**

Neumann, Iver B. and Wigen, Einar (2015) Remnants of the Mongol imperial tradition. In: Halperin, Sandra and Palan, Ronen, (eds.) Legacies of Empire: Imperial Roots of the Contemporary Global Order. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. ISBN 9781107109469

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Available in LSE Research Online: April 2016

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*Remnants of the Mongol Imperial Tradition*<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 5, pp. 99-127 in Sandra Halperin & Ronen Palan (eds.) *Legacies of Empire: Imperial Roots of the Contemporary Global Order* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015

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*Introduction: The Problem <A>*

We should not take for granted that remnants of ‘Western’ imperial tradition are the only ones on display today. It is true that Europe and its settler states dominated the world economically and politically in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. That does not necessarily mean, however, that the broad European imperial tradition succeeded in eradicating other imperial traditions. There is, furthermore, the possibility that the European tradition was itself indebted to other traditions. In this chapter, we will make the case for the relevance of what we call the Eurasian steppe tradition. We will focus on its lingering importance, and only touch on its historical role as the main other in early European state formation. Part one of the chapter charts the 1500-year long history of the steppe tradition and tries to capture it by way of an ideal type, and

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<sup>1</sup> We should like to thank our editors and fellow contributors as well as Bjørnar Sverdrup-Thygesen and Rune Svarverud.

contrasts it not with an ideal type of contemporary ‘Western’ polities, but of 19<sup>th</sup> century-style European empires. Part two is a brief discussion of how the imperial steppe tradition was obfuscated by the European political tradition on the level of discourse. Part three traces the continuing importance of the steppe tradition in three areas, namely Central Asia, Turkey and Russia.

*A Nomadic Imperial Tradition <A>*

Although the pre-history of the imperial steppe tradition in Eurasia stretches back at least to the eighth century BC, and includes some predominantly Iranic-speaking polities, the first documented Eurasian steppe empire, that of the Hsiung-Nu, hails from 209 BC (Cosmo 2004). The best documented and best known empire in the Eurasian steppe tradition is the Mongol empire. Discussions of immediate precursors are frequently referred to as ‘Turko-Mongol’ in the literature. So are successors, although there is a bifurcation at the very end of the living tradition. At the time of their respective demise in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Zunghar empire was a Mongol affair, while the Crimean Khanate was a Turkic one (that is, a Turkic-speaking dynasty of Mongol lineage).

From its very beginning, the steppe tradition was derivative of sedentary polity building. Steppe polities were based on pastoral nomadism, which emerged historically only when agriculture was in place. Furthermore, steppe empires formed in order to prey on trade routes between sedentaries, and raid and, where possible, take tribute from them (Barfield 1989; also Lattimore 1940). Sedentaries were also the ones to evolve writing, and are consequently our main source on steppe empires.

This makes for a certain lop-sidedness of sources, among other things because there is little mention in the sources of how steppe empires also served as a magnet for disgruntled sedentaries who wanted to run away from tax state burdens (see Scott 2009). To take but two examples, what little we know of the Merovingian empire demonstrates important steppe hybridization, and the hybridized nature of the Bulgar polity that emerged from the merging of Bolgars from the steppe and sedentary Slavs is well known. The Eurasian steppe tradition is the *pudenda origo* of European states (Neumann & Wigen 2013).

To the extent that there exists a scholarly consensus, scholars believe that Steppe empires emerged as a result of a fixed pattern that we may call polysynthetic. Some particularly ambitious young man would establish himself as head of a group of households. such groups are usually referred to as ‘tribes’, and defined in terms of perceived common ancestry.<sup>2</sup>

If a leader and his ‘tribes’ proved particularly good at raiding caravans and sedentaries, he would attract ever more of the familiar ‘tribes’, until the momentum was there to conquer more ‘tribes’ with other traditional allegiances. When taken to its logical extreme, as did Genghis Khan and his lineage, the so-called Golden Kin, the resulting empire could envelop the entire steppe and begin to conquer sedentaries on a more permanent basis. When the founder of the empire died, there was,

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<sup>2</sup> Scott (2009: 259) argues that tribes are a by-product of state-formation, and represent those elements who are not (yet) fully incorporated as a subject of the state, such as the peasantry.

invariably, a succession struggle. Empires rarely survived for more than a couple of generations.

Following the Hsiung-nu and the Huns, particularly successful steppe empires organized along similar lines include the Uigur and the Khitan Empires. The Uigurs, whose powers peaked in the late eighth century, was a nomadic turned sedentary people which had considerable experience in ruling sedentary populations and cities. The Khitans were a semi-nomadic Turko-Mongolian people that had established the Liao dynasty, been displaced, and returned as a key steppe force of the twelfth century (Sverdrup-Thygesen 2013).

The Mongols borrowed their alphabet (and used it until about a century ago), their way of setting up a chancery and the concept of scribes from the Uigurs. The Khitans, who were brought into the Mongol fold in 1218, had administered a loose and non-confessional steppe empire based on tribute extracted by decimally organised cavalry (Morgan 1986: 49). For this, they had used intermediaries, and these are the direct predecessors of the *darugha* used by the Mongols, the Turkish concept for which is *basqaq* (Morgan 1986: 109). The Mongol intermediaries that ran the Golden Horde in Russia in the early decades were locally known as the *baskaki*.

All empires function by the use of intermediaries. Genghis's key tool was his imperial guard, which had at its core his classificatory brothers (*anda*) and people who had chosen to leave their tribe to follow him personally (*nöker*). The guard, which included representatives of all the Mongolian tribes ('a useful form of hostage-taking',

Morgan 1986: 90 comments), and which was in effect Genghis's household, numbered around 10.000 at the outset of his conquests.

Although the Mongols made eminent use of heavy wooden saddles and composite bows, their key advantage in warfare was their strategy, which emphasised protracted training, advance planning, multi-strand coordination and tight discipline. Alone at the time, they concentrated their thinking not on the single combatant or on a small group of soldiers, but on the *tümen*, (Russian: t'ma), a unit ideally composed of ten thousand men, though it was officially recognised that actual *tümen* would be undermanned (Allsen 1987: 193). The land needed to man a *tümen* was also used by the Mongols as the basic administrative unit. At the height of its power, in the mid-thirteenth century, the Mongol empire, in the shape of four different polities, covered most of the known world, from the Pacific coast to Russian lands and from the high north to the waters outside Japan. India, which was not at that time a Mongol possession, was to become so under Babur.

The Mongols lay claim to universal sovereignty. They conceived the world as a Mongol empire to be, under Genghis Khan's successors, known as the Golden Kin. All peoples were potential members of the universal Mongol empire. Allsen writes that these political ideas can be traced back to the Türk Kaganate, and were in all likelihood transmitted to the Mongols by the Uighur Turks. In the Mongol adaptation of this ideological system it was held that Eternal Heaven (*Möngke Tenggeri*), the sky god and the chief deity of the [Shamanistic] steppe nomads, bestowed upon Genghis Khan a mandate to bring the entire world under his sway. This grant of universal sovereignty gave the Mongols the right, or perhaps more accurately, placed upon

them the obligation, to subjugate and chastise any nation or people refusing to join the Empire of the Great Mongols on a voluntary basis (Allsen 1987: 42).<sup>3</sup>

The key principle of organisation was biological and classificatory kinship.

Succession was a major challenge to the Mongol Empire, as it was for all steppe polities. As the Mongols had no less than *three* succession principles, both primogeniture, ultimogeniture and collateral seniority, it was increasingly difficult to decide *who* held the best claim to the imperial title. It was Ghengis Khan's *family* as such who held the legitimate right to rule, and each potential contender was allotted a place within the hierarchy of the state. The centre of the empire was the kaghan's, but the eastern bit (also known as the 'blue' portion) was allotted to one of the other brothers and the western bit (known as the 'white' and later 'golden' portion) was allotted to yet another brother. As each of these geographical areas also corresponded to a part of the army and hence also the state, this meant that each of them had a base for launching a bid for succession once the kaghan had died. And such a 'bid' had its function: it was the way by which rulers gained legitimacy to rule. Showing prowess in the power struggle that ensued following a leader's fall was proof of possession of *qut*, the Turko-Mongol concept for divine grace. Being able to play the power game necessary to win the title, and also to fight for it in battle, was in and of itself legitimising the effort. There was the institution of the *kuriltay*, a inter-tribal council where representatives of all the tribes had to sanction the new leader's accession. However, *de facto* power had a legitimising effect in itself, and *kuriltays* had a tendency to legitimise the most powerful, and hence most able, candidate.

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of a heavenly mandate was, of course, also a Chinese idea (comp. de Rachewiltz 1971: 104).

The language of the fights over succession was the one of the *jasagh*, the rules of the ancestors, which were supposed to be upheld and to which respect should be paid, not least when these were used creatively. Although the custom was for the youngest son to follow his father, there was no automatic succession involved. The candidates built alliances that felt one another out until one candidate emerged as the stronger one and called a *kuriltai* where the leading Genghisid successors were to consecrate him (Allsen 1987: 34). After Genghis Khan died in 1227, his youngest son Tolui took over as regent, but in 1229 it was Ögödei who made *khagan*. When he died in 1241, a protracted fight between the Toluids and the Ögödeians ended when Tolui's oldest son Möngke made *khagan* in 1251. This protracted fight was of key importance to European history, and we will return to it below.

*Ideal Type: Steppe Patrimonialism <A>*

The key thing in this chapter is to point up legacies and remnants of a non-European imperial tradition. One way of doing this is to start from a juxtaposition of an ideal type of Eurasian steppe empires to one of Western empires. Where mode of production is concerned, agriculture is the obvious base for ideal types of European-type polities, be that states or empires. The basic mode of production of Eurasian steppe empires, namely pastoral nomadism, does in fact have agricultural production as its precondition for emergence. Historically, pastoral nomadism in the steppe co-existed with some apiculture, horticulture and even agriculture, and it was not unusual for steppe marginals to spend much time on agriculture. That is of little concern to an ideal type, however.



European ideal types of empire invariably stress the importance of a territorial centre from which power radiates, at a gradient, so that the imperial presence tapers off around the edges. Such a model is dependent on there being a sedentary production that may produce a surplus that can feed the empire's administrators. Steppe empires depart from this in two major ways. First, every single household, those of local aristocrats included, pursued nomadic pastoralism. Secondly, due to climatic factors, the form of nomadism practiced tended to be transhumant. This means that nomadic routes are followed in the summer season, while the winter season is spent in quarters. This makes for a difference in temporality where capitals are concerned, with European imperial capitals operating at full strength most of if not all of the year, and Eurasian steppe empires being mainly winter residence. As a corollary, steppe empire capitals were usually located in a valley. The capital of the Mongol empire was, for example, Karakorum on the Orkhon River, built by Genghis Khan's son Ögödei (Purdue 2005: 23-24).

Two key traits of ideal-type European empires are the importance of middle men, and the importance of there being specific and various bargains between the centre and each middle man, so-called heterogeneous contracting (Nexon & Wight 2006). These traits are immediately recognizable in European steppe empires as well, with the twist that middle men had to travel to the imperial centre in order to receive their patent (*yarlik*) for rule. The two ideal types are also at one in having personal relationships between the Emperor/Kagan and his henchmen being important, but typically, the key henchmen of European empires would fill administrative functions (a Colbert, a Disraeli), whereas key henchmen of the Kagan (*nöker, anda*) would fill a military

function.<sup>4</sup> The precondition of possibility for this is the different degree of functional specificity of the two types, a difference that may ultimately be traced back to the difference in mode of production. Another, and we would argue crucial, difference evolves from a much-discussed change in European polities away from basing politics primarily on loyalty to the ruler towards basing it more and more on loyalty to the polity as such.<sup>5</sup> There is no parallel to this development where the Eurasian steppe empires are concerned, which is why Weber characterized them as patrimonial, with *sultanism* being the purest form of patrimonialism. Khazanov (2001: 4-5 *et passim*) highlights the role of *charisma* within the steppe tradition. Weber categorizes sultanism as traditional and leaves out the charismatic. We will argue that particularly 20<sup>th</sup>-century sultanism has involved a patrimonially organised state led by a charismatic leader. Both the Bolshevik and the Kemalist regimes came to power after historical discontinuities in the principles of rule. It would be meaningless to argue that they took their legitimacy from tradition. Rather, it was Lenin's, Stalin's and Kemal Atatürk's ability to do away with tradition that bolstered their charismatic positions.

European empires were what a historian of religion would call cult based, in that the aspect of religion that was key to legitimation was the Church. As already noted, steppe empires drew on a different aspect of religion for their legitimation. Rather than tying legitimation to the cultic aspect, which would traditionally have meant foregrounding shamans as cultic specialists, they emphasized the ruler's heavenly

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<sup>4</sup> Comp. West, Elizabeth Endicott (1989) *Mongolian Rule in China* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>5</sup> This tradition is often referred to as a republican one (Onuf 1998).

mandate. Where religious legitimacy in the European case is tied to the social institution of the Church, in Eurasia it is tied to the social institution of leadership.<sup>6</sup>

Where middleman maintenance is concerned, there is a key difference that may be traced back to the difference in mode of production. The middle men of European empires typically traded economic surplus for imperial protection. The middle men of Eurasian empires, however, typically *received* parts of the spoils of operations such as raiding caravans and taking tribute from sedentaries in exchange for participation. A similar difference emerges where marriage patterns are concerned: Eurasian empires typically sported dynastic marriages. The Golden Kin intermarried, too, but typically, the Kagan's household was wife-giving to middle men (Kotkin 2007).

Since the loyalty of middle men was dependent on spoils distributed by the Kagan, success in war was followed by the distribution of loot. This ran into problems as soon as nomadic raids resulted in territorial conquests and actual rule over sedentaries. When one 13<sup>th</sup> century nomadic leader came across the treasure chamber of a newly-conquered sedentary state and was about to distribute it among his subjects, which he thought would give him everlasting fame (and thus loyalty from his middle men), his Persian advisor suggested a different course of action:

If thou distributest a treasure to the multitude

Each householder will receive but a grain of rice.

Why takest thou not from each a barley-corn of silver

That thou mayest accumulate everyday a treasure?

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<sup>6</sup> Note that the Byzantines tried to have it both ways, with the Basileus having a heavenly mandate *and* the Church being a legitimating mainstay of the empire. Anachronistically, this is referred to as Caesaro-Papism.

The practice of taxing sedentary subjects, and indeed having subjects at all (rather than defining them as outsiders to be plundered) is something that sedentary (mostly Persian) advisors introduced to the steppe-nomadic rulers. This was part of a fundamentally different way of conceptualizing the relationship between ruler and ruled from what the steppe nomads had adhered to previously. This is a case of hybridity between nomadic and sedentary practices of statecraft. Since political loyalty was just as valuable as material wealth, and both less vulnerable and burdensome to nomads (treasure is heavy and can easily be plundered by other nomads), according to the ideal type rulers seek to convert material capital into symbolic and social capital as soon as possible.

Finally, there are important systematic differences in personnel between the two types of empire, both where the elite and the people are concerned.

*Elites.* European polities, empires included, were typically dynastic, with some of them even carrying the name of the dynasty (the Habsburgs, the Oldenburgs). Successions might be intra-dynastic, or they could be between different lineage-based dynasties (the Yorks vs the Lancasters, the Guelphs vs the Ghibellines). Eurasian steppe empires were also dynastic, but here it was an entry value for any pretender that he should belong to one specific kinship group, namely the founder kinship of the empire.

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<sup>7</sup> Translation taken from Edwin Arnold (trans. & ed.) (1899), *The Gulistan of Sa'di*, chapter 1 'Manner of Kings', couplet 18. Our gratitude goes to Ashk Dahlén for directing us to this source.

*Populations.* The basic unit of European empires was the household, which was tied to a plot of land and often also to a village. The basic unit of steppe empires was the household, which was multiethnic and multilingual. These were moveable. The territoriality of European empires is typically tied to fixed areas and regions, whereas steppe empires are typically tied to interchangeable grazing lands and trekking routes. This translates into systematic differences when empires break up: European empires typically break up along territorial lines, whereas Eurasian empires break up into discrete ‘tribes’. With the ascendance of that scourge of empire, nation, national originary myths will vary accordingly.

*Leadership in battle.* European empires were largely built by sacrificing ‘other people’s lives’, with the monarch and aristocracy leading from the rear. While the dynasty and the aristocracy were ideally martial, they were not expected to die in pursuit of imperial goals to the same extent as were the peasants. In steppe empires war-making was the duty and the privilege of the nomads who formed the backbone of the polity, and while there was a hierarchy among them and one may reasonably assume that those further down the hierarchy were more likely to die in battle than the khagan, they were all expected to fight and potentially die. The khagan led from the front, and he led ‘his own’ rather than mercenaries or conquered peasants. While conquered nomads would be enrolled in the horde, sedentary subjects were assets rather than a fighting force, and were not considered to have anything to do with war (Barthold 1968: 291).

*The character of the boundary populations.* Eurasian steppe empires will typically envelop ever new steppe-dwelling ‘tribes’, until the population living closest to the

sedentaries will have the choice between being enveloped or taking refuge amongst the sedentaries. Typically, a critical mass of warriors will choose the latter alternative, and will then go on to earn a living as border guards. Advancing steppe empires and their remnants will, therefore, typically stand against forces paid for by sedentaries but consisting of former steppe peoples as well as sedentaries. Border populations of European empires will typically build and man defences against the Eurasian steppe empires, whereas Eurasian empires will organize their border populations on a raiding and tribute-taking, i.e. an offensive, basis.

This discussion could easily have been expanded to cover systematic differences between sedentary and nomadic empires, but since the basic use to which we are going to put it is to demonstrate that remnants of imperial steppe tradition lead a subterranean existence in a world practically and theoretically dominated by European imperial remnants, we chose to be Euro-centric about it. We may summarize our contrasting discussion as follows:

	<b>European</b>	<b>Eurasian</b>
Mode of production	Agriculture	Nomadic pastoralism
Differentiation of production	High	Low
Capital active:	Year-round	If capital – Winter
Contract centre-periphery	Law-based	Patrimonial
Middle men	Are tied to administration	Are tied to the Kagan personally
	Are administrative	Are military
	Give spoils and women	Receive surplus and women
Religion legitimating	Cultic	Personal
Dynastic succession	Inter	Intra
Major population units	Villages/regions	Households
Military leadership	From the rear	From the front
Loyalty	Increasingly to the polity	To the ruler

Table 1. Ideal-typical traits of European and Eurasian empires compared.

Since the imperial family and its entourage was nomadic as distinct from sedentary, however, its legacy is somewhat more dispersed than most imperial legacies, in both a spatial and symbolic sense.

*Remnants of the Steppe Tradition: Personnel <A>*

Human remnants of the Mongol empire's four major offshoots are in evidence. The Yuan dynasty in China lasted until 1348. The Ilkhans in Persia lasted approximately as long. In the West, however, the Golden Kin stuck it out in the felt tent capital of Saray whence they could maintain a steppe-based lifestyle. Muscovy seems to have stopped paying tribute to the Khipchak Khanate sometime around 1470, and made an alliance with the Western part of what was left of it in 1502. Muscovy effectively swallowed its partner, and in 1507, Sigismund of Poland-Lithuania was 'granted' the Western part from its last Khan. The Khipchak Khanate was no more.

In the steppe itself, unsurprisingly, the living tradition lasted longer. The Yuan dynasty had an afterlife north of the Chinese border. In the mid-fifteenth century, the Oirat Empire was a major steppe force (Purdue 2005: 59). It was followed by one last Mongol imperial steppe polity, the Zunghar empire, which sported a new glue, Tibetan Buddhism. The first Mongol contact with Tibetan Buddhism since the thirteenth century occurred in 1566, when the Ordos Mongol Khutukhai Secen Hongtiji (1540-1586) traveled to Tibet. In 1578, his successor Altan Khan gave

Sodnam Gyamtsho ‘the title of “Dalai Lama” (Oceanic Teacher in Mongolian<sup>8</sup>), and the Dalai Lama declared Altan to be the reincarnation of Khubilai Khan’ (Purdue 2005: 66). One Mongolian offshoot, the Kalmyk, moved west and arrived north of the Caucasus from Inner Asia in the 1620s, causing the usual ripple effect on the steppe by pushing the graze lands of the Nogays further west, which in turn became a factor in increasing the raids of the Nogays and the Crimean Tatars against Russian sedentaries (Khadorkovsky 2004: 132-133). By the seventeenth century, the Kalmyks were a major power in the western steppe. The living imperial steppe tradition was liquidated by the expansion of two sedentary empires, Chinese and Russian, into the steppe. And yet, there were remnants.

The Crimean Khanate was the main successor to the Khipchak Khanate, and although they remained fairly stationary around the Crimean peninsula and their capital Bakhchisaray, old steppe habits died hard. Their political organization was certainly straight out of the steppe tradition (Fisher 1970: 10). Furthermore, the Crimean continued lucrative steppe pursuits like raiding, tribute-taking and slave trading. In 1571, Crimean Tatar attacked Moscow, and the attacks continued on a lesser scale. After the Russian annexation in 1784, some 50-75 per cent of the Crimean Tatar population decamped for the Ottoman Empire (McNeill 1964: 199). According to Reşat Kasaba (2009: 9; see also Fisher 1999: 181), as many as 900.000 Muslims left Crimea and the Caucasus in the eight years following the Crimean War (1853-56). In this case, the answer to where the Mongol-Turkic population went is Anatolia. That is, in fact, the answer that usually applies.

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<sup>8</sup> Note the similarity with the *title* Genghis Khan (his name was Temüjin), which means *oceanic/universal khan/ruler*.



The Cossacks were another story, and present themselves as a key example of the hybridizing fallout of empire. They congealed not from pastoral households, but from runaways from all kinds of different polities towards frontier settlements. The steppe polities and the Cossacks both perpetuated Mongol practices, but they did so in different ways (McNeill 1964: 115-116, 118).

By the time of the Napoleonic Wars, physical remnants of the steppe tradition were reduced to territorially bounded units along the Russian-Chinese border.

Contemporary examples include the state of Mongolia, Inner Mongolia in China, Buryatia and Tuva in Russia.

*Social Fact Remnants of the Imperial Eurasian Steppe Tradition <A>*

Having traced the steppe polities up to their demise in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, we now turn to a discussion of remnants understood as social facts (as opposed to personnel). The hitch regarding wide-ranging historical discussions like the following is always the same; the number of variables in play is so large that it is very hard to establish that any one phenomenon is a causal effect of any one set of historical patterns. The argument must remain a tentative and somewhat underspecified one, at least until more work has been done.

We begin with the most obvious case, which is Central Asia, and then proceed with the increasingly less clear-cut cases of Turkey and Russia. Before we proceed, however, we want to make note of a fourth case that is in need of further work, but that we leave out here for reasons of space and lack of expertise. That is the Sub-Continent.

In terms of political tradition, both Pakistan and India were heavily influenced by the Mughal Empire. The Mughal Empire is literally the Mongol Empire, with Mughal (and Moghul) being different repeat of note above (and phonetically more accurate) transcriptions of the same word. This was a vast empire centred on Delhi from 1526 until the British expanded upon them, abolishing it in 1857 and claiming the title for themselves in 1876. The elite of the Mughal Empire were to a large extent Persians and Turks , but they were, like everyone else, heavily influenced by Mongol politics. The problem in determining Mongol influence is that much of the areas ruled by Mongols were ruled by Turks both before and after Mongol domination. And since Turkic and Mongol political traditions are so heavily intertwined and thus similar, it is almost impossible to tell what is a Mongol influence and what is a Turkic influence when it comes to political institutions and traditions.

#### *Tradition in Central Asian States <B>*

Afghanistan is probably *the* key geographical site where sedentary-nomadic relations of the kind that emerged with the demise of the Mongols is still the order of the day. People wait to be told whom to vote for (Barfield 2010: 331). This is reminiscent of the way the *kuriltay* was an institution for *confirming* the most powerful khan as *kaghan*, rather than an instrument for selecting the leader. If we believe Barfield, the Afghans took recent elections to be a way to express their loyalty to the supreme force (the Americans) by voting for the man that this supreme force wanted to rule. When the Americans did not explicitly say whom to vote for, the Afghans were at a loss. Similarly, elections in former Soviet republics in Central Asia, such as Kyrgyzstan,

systematically elect the candidate supported by Moscow. This is not to say that there is no election fraud, but that the expectation on the part of the population is not that elections are instruments for selecting leaders, but merely to confirm the most powerful man as the supreme leader.

It is also no coincidence that when the Central Asian republics (as well as Azerbaijan in the Caucasus) suddenly needed a political past upon which to base their identities as sovereign states after the fall of the Soviet Union, they reached to political lineages going back to the Mongols and to the same imperial title from which the Mughals, the Muscovites and Ottomans claimed *translatio imperii*. This can hardly be called a historical accident, as many descendants of Ghengis Khan explicitly identify as such. The memory of the Mongol Empire is still something to be used for political purposes, even though in Afghanistan the Mongol invasion is still remembered for its devastating consequences for sedentary civilisation. Among the Hazaras, an outlying group of Mongolian-looking people in Pakistan and Afghanistan, many men can recite their genealogies going back about 34 generations to Genghis Khan.<sup>9</sup>

In what can be termed a 'wider Central Asia', the political traditions we explore here were the *main mode of conducting politics* until the 1920s (Barfield 2002). In some areas, most notably in Afghanistan but also in Iran, focusing on steppe and sedentary imbrication is arguably still the most relevant way of shedding light on state-society relations (Barfield 2010). In Iran, the last explicit vestiges of the power of the nomads was shattered only in the 1930s, when Shah Reza Pahlavi blocked nomadic migrations by placing army units at strategic points (Barfield 2002: 84). Yet, in terms

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/838099/posts>, retrieved 7 February 2012.

of the state itself, there can be little doubt that a symbiosis between Azeri Turkic elements and Persians is the *modus operandi*. Turkey may seem the odd one out, with almost 90 years of uninterrupted and outright adoption of Western practices. And yet, one way to see Mustafa Kemal is as a charismatic state founder, whose charisma is used by a clan (the Kemalists) to rule with the semi-divine authority of the founder. This analogy to early Turkic states (and in particular the Ottoman) is useful as a heuristic device. Ruling (or at least trying to rule) in the name of the state founder (literally; Mustafa Kemal – Kemalists) is a typical trait of Turkic state building.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, what Peter Golden (1992: 305) terms *politiconyms* took the place of ethnonyms, with an identity as *Stalinist*, *Kemalist*, *Putinist* taking the place of ethnic identity as the main social marker. Moreover, we would contend that the ethnogenesis of the category Turk, as it was formulated by the modern Turkish Republic, was in fact a question of loyalty to the state, and a possibility (for Muslims) of opting in or out of the *political project* led by Mustafa Kemal.

This is a direct influence not only of the steppe tradition, but an innovation that came about with the demise of the Mongol Empire. The first such politiconyms were derived directly from the names of descendants of Ghengis. It is still a way to denote political loyalty in Eurasia today.

*Legacy in Turkey* <B>

The Mongol polity that emerged in the 'Islamic lands' was centred on what is today Iran. It bordered the Mamluk state in the southwest, with a frontier running through Syria. Their Turkic vassals in Anatolia, the Seljuqs, had a frontier with the Byzantines running through northwestern Anatolia. The polity had its origin in the campaign launched by Hülegü Khan, notorious for sacking Baghdad in 1258. The campaign was launched on the orders of Kublai Khan, Hülegü's brother and *kaghan*. Mongol expansion in the south-west was halted by the Mamluks, a state ruled by an army composed of enslaved steppe nomads converted to Islam. As the Mongol army was to experience on several occasions, most notably at 'Ayn Jâlût, the Mamluks employed the same tactics as the Mongols, and knew the weaknesses of Mongol warfare (Amitai 1992: 139).

According to received wisdom, the Ottoman *beylik*, the Ottoman polity before it became an empire, was originally founded with a charter from the Seljuq sultan in Anatolia. The American scholar Rudi Lindner takes issue with this view, on the basis that at the time when the *beylik* is thought to have come into existence (1299), the Seljuqs were little more than vassals of the Il-khanid ruler Ghazan Khan, seated in Tabriz, in what is today north-western Iran. Lindner's hypothesis that the Ottomans received their charter from the Ilkhanids in return for help in quelling a rebellion among the Mongols in Anatolia is based on little more than historical context, combined with a single coin tying Osman to the Ilkhanids minted in 1299. The other account is merely based on Ottoman chroniclers (*vakanüvis*) writing more than a century after the fact, and under completely different political circumstances. However, the Mongol connection (if there ever was one) was soon written out of official Ottoman historiography, and Ottoman chroniclers invested much in the

*translatio imperii* from the Seljuqs. As the Seljuqs were also part of the same tradition, having migrated to Anatolia some two centuries earlier, but maintained contact eastwards during this period, the connection between the Ottomans and the steppe tradition is not disputed, merely the time and manner of *translatio*. Having emerged on this frontier between the Ilkhanids/Seljuqs and the Byzantines, the Ottoman polity's mode of statecraft was highly dependent upon steppe nomadic elements.

We now turn to the attributes of the Ottoman polity seen in the light of our ideal type. First, the art of warfare and surplus extraction by the state. The military success of the early Ottoman polity has been the subject of some debate. Paul Wittek (1938) provides the baseline interpretation that the polity drew warriors motivated by religious zeal, with the practice of *gaza* being the *only foreign policy available* to the early Ottoman polity. While he does not mention the main mode of surplus extraction by steppe nomadic polities, the American Ottomanist Heath Lowry (2005) has argued at book's length that

the Ottomans were not primarily a state dedicated to the concept of *gaza* (Holy War), nor were its *gazis*, many of whom were not even Muslims, primarily motivated by a desire to spread Islam. Their goal was booty, plunder, and slaves (Lowry 2005: 43).

The Ottomans, at least in their very earliest phase, mobilised their army through the distribution of looted resources. It didn't take them long to establish a treasury and start taxation, but hybridity on this matter started already among the Seljuqs in Iran in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the Ilkhanids in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In accordance with Wittek's emphasis on religion for military mobilisation, the polity was also supposedly tied to Islam from the very beginning. Lowry, on the other hand, argues that the polity was not founded by the Turkic nomad chieftain Osman alone, but in conjunction with two other military leaders. These two were probably local *Christian* warlords who had recently converted to Islam. That these were later 'written out' of official Ottoman historiography as it started to be written in the fifteenth century, is easily attributable to the Ottoman dynasty's consolidation of power, and the introduction of Islam as a precondition for prestige (although not political influence).

Loyalty and kinship were the key political markers in steppe nomadic tradition, not religion as such. As the Ottomans were very much part of this tradition, there is little reason that they should have avoided cooperation with local Christians.

Although he does not push the connection with steppe practices much further, Lowry concludes that the way Osman became first among equals in the polity

is reminiscent of the Turko-Mongol practice of the *Khuriltay*, the assemblies where leaders were traditionally chosen/elected in such societies on the basis of their ability (Lowry 2005: 65).

What we see here is that, as Lowry points out, Osman was confirmed as head of what later became the 'Ottoman' polity, another example of a politiconym, by use of a *khuriltay*, a legitimising device for confirming the accession of the most powerful

leader. However, it should be pointed out that the criteria used for selecting a leader was to a great extent the principle of letting the most powerful tribal leader rule. In addition to this *khuriltay*, we see many features that are reminiscent of Mongol forms of organisation. There are what we may analytically call the *anda* (the ‘oath-sworn’, the *comitatus*) of Osman, the classificatory brothers, who acted as military commanders. Due to the paucity of sources, we have no indication as to how Osman, the much-celebrated founder of the Empire, related to his much less celebrated co-founders, other than the story of how he refused to make war on them when his biological brother suggested so (Lowry 2005: 68).

Another key feature of Eurasian nomadic-emergent polities is their lack of attachment to cities and particular capitals. If one excepts Iran, no empire has ever changed capital as frequently as the Ottoman Empire and its successor state Turkey. Having started as a nomadic venture in the area around *Söğüt* on the frontier between the Seljuqs/Ilkhanids and Byzantines in north-western Anatolia, they established a capital in Bursa as soon as that city had fallen to their forces in 1324. The capital was then moved to Edirne in 1365, and again to Constantinople in 1453. Then, when Constantinople, which was by then also known as Istanbul, was occupied by the British in 1918, parts of the state elite relocated to Anatolia and set up a competing military and later administrative centre first in Erzurum and then in Ankara. Ankara, having become a *de facto* counter capital in 1920, was formalised as the capital of Turkey in 1922, which it still is. Our guess is that it is only a matter of time before the capital is moved again, this time back to Istanbul.



The Ottomans never had a good claim to descent from the most prestigious lineages of the steppe, but invested much in trying to conjure up such a connection by creating genealogies reaching back to Oğuz Khan. Politics was a matter of intra-dynastic competition, with a system resembling the Mongol up until Süleyman the Magnificent in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottomans even recognised the dynasty of the Crimean Tatars (who were descended from the Golden Horde), as legitimate ‘golden kin’, who were accepted as legitimate heirs to the Ottoman throne, should the Ottoman dynasty die out. While no other vassal dynasty was considered appropriate as successors, it follows that the Ottomans were very much alert to the prestige of Genghis Khan’s lineage, a lineage that has no prestige according to Islamic tradition, the Mongols being considered barbarians, something that was heightened by Hülegü’s sacking of Baghdad in 1258.

As the Ottomans made war in the Balkans, its campaigns became more and more reliant on siege artillery and infantry, as besieging and storming citadels and fortresses became the order of the day. The immediate result was that the martial role of the nomads decreased significantly. Moreover, the ‘nomad party’, centred on Edirne, increasingly lost out in the palace intrigue in Istanbul.<sup>10</sup> However, the nomads were still a force to be reckoned with, and the symbolic order of the state was strongly tied to traditions emerging from the steppe, at least in times of war.

Nevertheless, although the relationship between the nomads and the sedentary central administration in Istanbul was often strained, the nomads still played a key defensive role on the frontiers until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Balkans, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of a case where the Sultan (Osman II) attempted to make an alliance with the Turcoman nomads on the frontier to outsmart the Janissaries in Istanbul, see Piterberg 2003.

Caucasus and the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Arab-speaking and Kurdish-speaking lands to the south. The Turkish historian Reşat Kasaba argues that in the early part of Ottoman history ‘maintaining a nomadic presence, especially in the frontier regions of the empire, was an important source of strength. The imperial center used these communities as tentacles of its reach into neighboring territories’ (Kasaba 2009: 8). These ‘tentacles’ consisted not only of Turks, but also of Tatars, the very remnants of the Golden Horde. Moreover, to call the nomads of the Ottoman Empire mere ‘tentacles’ seems to understate the case. The nomads were a key component of the composite nomadic-sedentary state, not merely a tool that the centre used to reach into neighbouring realms. The nomads were just as much directed inwards as they were outwards. Balancing the sedentaries (and the standing army, in most cases infantry) against the nomads (the nomadic cavalry) was a central aspect of running such a state.

The Ottomans made a point of maintaining largely open and mostly unmarked borders over which merchants, nomads, and other itinerant groups and individuals continued to move. There is little doubt that Ottoman rulers saw such openness and mobility as a source of strength. They supported social structures and policies that accommodated and strengthened the interaction of different communities across the empire (Kasaba 2009: 47).

The practices of the steppe nomads became less explicit at the core of the empire as time went on, but as a baseline for how things were done, they outlasted a steady stream of pious sultans who usually interpreted steppe practices as *haram* (in contradiction with religious law). One important such trace is in the prohibition against spilling royal blood, which the Ottomans observed carefully. Princes whose

very existence threatened the stability of the state through their potential as pretenders, where killed by strangulation as this prevented blood-letting. But it is when it came to war that the full battery of steppe symbolism came into play (see for example Wheatcroft 2008: 13).

As Wheatcroft points out, as late as the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century ‘Every function of the court had its travelling counterpart’ (2008: 15). The court in Istanbul transformed into a nomadic entity when the sultan was campaigning. And before departure on campaign, the Sultan himself moved into his tent, which was erected outside Istanbul (Wheatcroft 2008: 43). However, the ceremonial order of the army, with its *tuğ* (horse tail banners), carrying the significance of each of the elements of the army, similar to the banners used by the Mongol and their like, seem to have had little correspondence with actual fighting formations. The fighting against the Habsburgs had taken on a dynamic of its own, creating tactics, strategies and battle formations that were unlike the type of war fought by the Habsburgs in Europe and by the Ottomans in other theatres.

If we fast forward to the early 2000s, the lack of distinction between an economic and a political sector is not unique to the steppe tradition, but it is a key aspect of how a post-steppe state is run. An Azeri academic related in an interview with one of us regarding corruption in Azerbaijan that ‘one cannot say that there is corruption in the system, in Azerbaijan corruption *is* the system’.<sup>11</sup> What the Americans call the ‘spoils system’, through which a new president (or any other elected official) replaces much of the administrative staff in the parts of the bureaucracy over which he presides, is

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<sup>11</sup> Baku, Azerbaijan 7 January 2010.

taken to its logical extreme in the post-steppe states. An example may be taken from a Turkish businessman complaining to one of the authors about the ‘corruption’ of AKP government in Turkey. According to him, Turkish politicians have always hired people on the basis of political and personal loyalty, but the ruling party, AKP, goes further than previous government, now even the *çaycıs* (tea boys) at the national airline are appointed on the basis of loyalty to the AKP. While difficult to verify, it squares nicely with the AKP’s other practices and therefore sounds eminently plausible. With a large party organisation with a lot of people without education (a lot of them *çaycıs*), they have to distribute privileges to their supporters, as this is expected in a Eurasian state.<sup>12</sup> While some would call this corruption (as indeed it is by some Turks excluded from the privileges), that presupposes a clear distinction between an economic and a political sector. Typical of states where the steppe tradition plays a key role, in Turkey and Azerbaijan such a distinction is secondary to rewarding political supporters economically. This is not, as it often looks from a Western point of view, corruption in the system. It is, rather, the way Eurasian states are run.<sup>13</sup>

The economic and political sectors are not the only parts of society in a steppe political tradition that are left undifferentiated. Intellectuals are also expected to play their role by eulogising the *Kaghan*. Erdoğan has sought to silence all criticism by filing defamation lawsuits against almost all journalists who have criticised him. In

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<sup>12</sup> Note that Azerbaijan’s ruler İlham Aliyev takes this to another level, by e.g. simply *giving* a stake in a state-owned goldmine to his own daughter, see Ismayilova, Khadija and Nushaba Fatullayeva (2012) ‘Azerbaijan’s President Awarded Family Stake In Gold Fields’ *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*, May 3rd 2012, <http://www.reportingproject.net/occrp/index.php/en/ccwatch/cc-watch-indepth/1495-azerbaijans-president-awarded-family-stake-in-gold-fields> (retrieved 10.06.2012).

<sup>13</sup> Note that the relative importance attached to either principle is completely different in Turkey and Azerbaijan, with Azerbaijan, as well as the Central Asian republics being closer to the Eurasian ideal type.

May 2012, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan threatened to cut all funding to theatres, after one actor had lampooned his daughter. He condemned what he called the ‘despotic arrogance’ of intellectuals.<sup>14</sup> Arrogant despots, on the other hand, seem to be expected.

### *Remnants in Russia <B>*

When Batu died in 1256, he had built a tent capital in Saray on the Volga (100 km north of today’s Astrakhan) for his Khipchak Khanate, which came to be known locally as the Golde Horde.

We have little history writing on the Khipchak Khanate, among other things because its archives were destroyed together with most of its city life by Tamerlane’s nomadic invading force (emanating from Samarkand) in 1390.<sup>15</sup> Since the steppe-dwelling Mongols lacked expertise in running administrative apparatuses, throughout the Mongol Empire these were mostly staffed locally. In the case of the Khipchak Khanate, however, there was little by way of local administrative personnel to be found, and so the khagan relied on Khwarazm Turks (in Russian *Bessermíny*). The Khipchak Khanate adopted Islam as its official religion under Özbek (1313-1341), in conjunction with which they also adopted the Persian administrative *diwan* system.

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<sup>14</sup> Gibbons, Fiachra (2012) ‘Turkey’s PM threatens theatres after actor ‘humiliates’ daughter,’ *The Guardian*. 17th May 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/17/recep-tayyip-erdogan-theatre-daughter> (retrieved 10.06.2012).

<sup>15</sup> The Golden Horde had been in dynastic crisis since the death of Khan Berdibeg in 1359, one reason being that swelling of the numbers of the Golden Kin (Spuler 1965: vol. II). The object of the invasion was Khan Tokhtamesh (1376-1395), a previous protégé of Tamerlane’s who succeeded in uniting the Golden Horde with the White Horde to its east. The White Horde had been established by the same Mongol campaign that spied out the Russian lands in 1223.

The mix of Turko-Mongol, and also some Persian, elements was also pronounced amongst this dominant layer of population, which came to be known as Tatar.

Russian scholars have not really theorised their polity as an empire, and sometimes even denied its imperial character (see, for example, Riasanovsky 1967: 57).

Traditionally, Russian scholars have also toned down the impact of the steppe on Muscovy. To quote but one typical example, in 1788 Ivan Boltin argued that

Having defeated (the Rus') principalities, the Tatars imposed tribute on their enslaved subjects one by one. They then left baskaks (officials) to collect the tribute and placed their soldiers in the towns before returning to their own lands. Under (Tatar) rule, the Russians lived by the same laws that they had lived by before, and these laws remained unchanged after the yoke was overthrown. Their morals, dress, language, the names of the people and the country remained what they had always been, with the exception of a few small changes in social rituals, beliefs, and vocabulary that were borrowed from the Tatars (quoted in Sunderland 2004: 38).

This is a misleading move. First, 'social rituals' are at the heart of social and political life, and so any borrowings here are of the essence. The Muscovy head received steppe people, who, in accordance with the steppe tradition, came riding to ask for a patent on land, by accepting their kowtowing and granting them the patent to rule their polity (Sunderland 2004: 16), just as the Mongols had done back in Karakorum. Furthermore, the habit of kowtowing (*bit'chel'bom*) was ubiquitous within Muscovy society itself (Zorin 1959: 140). Secondly, Muscovy actually started propping up its

claims to being an imperial power on a par with the Holy Roman Empire by invoking its conquests of the successor states of the Kipchak Khanate. Furthermore, when Muscovy vanquished Kazan in 1552, Astrakhan in 1554 and Siberia in 1580, each time the khanate crown was taken to be displayed in St. Petersburg (Khadorkovsky 2004: 45). The pride that Russians took in being the key successor of the Kipchak Khanate was also evident in the sixteenth century aristocratic fashion for tracing one's ancestry back to Mongols (Halperin 1987: 113). Moscow's imperial claims were also presented in terms of diplomatic practices that definitely hailed from the Mongols, and which therefore necessarily struck European interlocutors as Asian. As summed up by Charles J. Halperin (1987: 92),

Given the importance of Russia's relations with its oriental neighbors, it is natural that Muscovy drew upon Tatar diplomatic practices in establishing its own. Accordingly, Muscovite diplomatic protocol was essentially Asian.

Here we have a concrete and, given that diplomacy is something of a master institution in global politics, crucial early example of how Muscovy, and also the Russian empire, were shaped by the steppe tradition within which the former states are steeped. To Halperin's examples we may add others, such as the intense attempts at trying to keep diplomats and other aliens in the dark about internal affairs. Diplomats were met at the border and kept from seeing the lands they travelled through on the way to the capital. Once in Moscow, they were sequestered. One of us served as a guard and interpreter at the Norwegian embassy to Moscow in 1980. At that time, diplomats and other aliens were still required to apply for a travel permit if they wanted to drive further than 40 kilometres from Moscow. Then there were other

Russian practices that were distinctly non-Europeans, such as washing hands after shaking religiously unclean Catholic hands and refusing to eat with Catholics, basing their foreign policy apparatus on offices (*prikazy*) that were themselves modelled on early Mongol institutions, *etc.*<sup>16</sup>

Social, genealogical and anecdotal evidence aside, we turn now to an analytical discussion of the matter. Once again, we draw on the comparison of ideal types presented above.

Where mode of production is concerned, the spread of the Russian and Soviet empires is also the history of the spread of agriculture. The turning of the Pontic Steppe from sustaining primarily nomadic pastoralism to sustaining agriculture and the concurrent subduing of the Cossacks were firmly in place in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although there were major pushes towards more agriculture as late as the 1970s (Brezhnev's virgin land campaigns), remnants of nomadic pastoralism in today's Russia is a marginal phenomenon.

Where the temporality of the capital is concerned, Moscow is firmly an all-year capital. As late as two hundred years ago, in 1812, during the Napoleonic Wars (what Russians call the Patriotic War), General Mikhail Kutuzov famously abandoned Moscow and exploited the advantage suffered him by the depth of the terrain to the full. Contemporaries like de Bonald rightly commented on the nomadic character of this mode of waging war. Another poignant scene played itself out at the beginning of

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<sup>16</sup> Russian borrowings from the Mongols were extensive, see Vernadsky 1953: 127-130, 222-223, 333-390, comp. Halperin 1987: 90-95, 149n7 and, for a maximalist reading Ostrowski 1998 (also Ostrowski 2000; Halperin 2000).



the war, when Russian peasants received advancing French soldiers as guests. True to steppe tradition, they tried to keep out of politics (Kharkhordin 2001).

The key imperial trait of heterogeneous contracting was in evidence throughout the Russian and Soviet periods, and still is. The Russian empire perpetuated the steppe tradition by insisting that middle men come to the capital to get their patent of rule throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The key henchmen of the emperor were people fulfilling administrative functions, such as Mikhail Speranskiy. Soviet leaders were at one in being what they referred to as anti-Bonapartist, meaning that they were skeptical of military henchmen (or, more specifically, their potential for staging coups). This is a typical European, as opposed to Eurasian, trait of empire. Where the question of middle men loyalties is concerned, however, the Russian empire, the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia are at one in basing politics primarily on loyalty to the ruler, as opposed to basing it predominantly on loyalty to the polity as such, in the European style. Contemporary Russia is unquestionably, and sometimes explicitly, patrimonial.

As to middleman maintenance, the Russian experience is remarkably undecided.

From the late 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Russian aristocracy was firmly suppressed by the tsars, and Peter made it into a service nobility. The Russian empire does not fit the European mould, where aristocrats tended to be key middle men, in this regard. As a direct consequence of the nobility's weakness, experiments with 'self-government' in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century suffered from the lack of a clear group of middle men.

The Soviet system, whereby middle men sprang from the ranks of the Party, does not fit either mould. The entire question of regional autonomy has once again been a contested topic over the last twenty years, with the tendency being that the local base of middle men is weakening. We have, in the question of middle men maintenance, an issue that is very much alive in contemporary Russia. As regional governors have once again become presidential appointees, we are reverting to a situation where spoils (i.e. economic privileges) are divided by the political leader and given to middle men according to their loyalty to the political leadership. Ideal-typically, we contrasted an imperial Eurasian steppe tradition where middle men were recipients of spoils emanating from raiding and tribute to a European imperial tradition where middle men channel economic resources to the centre. This could, in principle, lead us to see the channelling of economic resources from the centre to the middle men as a reversion to a Eurasian pattern. When we do not want to argue in favour of this, it is because we do not find the economic side of this relationship to be essential, but rather see it as an effect of the very personalised tie between the man on top and his middle men. The transfer of economic resources should, therefore, be seen as an aspect of Russian patrimonialism, rather than as a phenomenon that has independent explanatory power.

The expansion of the Russian empire owed much to the centre's perceived need to keep people in, and the Soviet experience repeated the pattern with rather different ideological cadences (see Scott 2009, Lieven 2000). Since this was the expansion of a sedentary empire, the question of comparing the nature of its boundaries to those of Eurasian steppe empires seems moot.

We may conclude that, until the Napoleonic Wars, the Russian empire owed a lot to the Eurasian steppe tradition. Since then, however, the remnants of that tradition have fallen by the wayside. There is, however, one key remnant of the imperial steppe tradition that still holds sway. During Soviet times, so-called cults of personality were stocks-in-trade of Russian politics. Today, the patrimonial nature of the Putin regime is not in doubt. Putin orchestrates campaigns that tout his physical and sexual prowess (he finds antiques at the bottom of the Black Sea and flies with cranes). Film cuts and stills of him doing judo, riding not horses but motorbikes, posing with a bare chest etc. are widely distributed, as are his portraits. For the presidential election 2012, one central ad sported a virgin who went to a fortune teller and was told that Putin would be 'her first'.<sup>17</sup>

In order to thrive economically and politically, would-be chiefs and middle men in today's Russia must pledge allegiance to the man on the top or risk confiscation. The so-called Khodorkovskiy affair is the most illustrating case in this regard. When Vladimir Putin took over as president, he invited key oligarchs – the seemingly independently rich who had emerged as key to Russian economic life during the 1990s – to a party at the Kremlin. Mikhail Borisovich Khodorkovskiy failed to turn up, and continued to argue in an independent fashion, as if his wealth were held independently of any political loyalty to Putin. Within a few years, his fortune was confiscated and he and his right hand man ended up in prison, where they still languish. This is fully in accordance with historical patterns. Confiscation was a standard practice in the Ottoman Empire (not to mention the Soviet Union), and seems to be so in post-1991 Russia. One may even see parallels between the

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2012/feb/29/putin-advert-russia-virgin-voters-video?newsfeed=true>, retrieved 4 May 2012.

confiscations and nationalisations of the Bolsheviks and the lack of an established right of property within other states in this tradition. Control of the nationalised property was then entrusted to loyal supporters of Stalin in much the same way as the *timar*-holders of the early Ottoman Empire were rewarded by the state.

Political struggles in today's Russia take the shape of patrons fighting one another with the help of clients. The chain of patrons ends at the top, with Putin. This patrimonialism is, we argue, a remnant of the Eurasian steppe tradition. The point here is certainly not that the steppe is the *only* source of such contemporary practices, which after all may be spotted in a number of settings around the world, but that the steppe tradition is *among* the historical phenomena that shape the specific Russian practices in point here.

### *Conclusion*

It would be wrong to assume that European empires are the only ones to leave their mark on today's polities. The steppe empires were among the most influential, and one may still see its legacies in many aspects of political practices and legitimising narratives across Eurasia. It is still alive in parts of Central Asia. It has left a solid legacy in Turkey, as well as remnants in Russia. The difference between these polities and European ones are often observed. The debt they owe to the Eurasian imperial steppe tradition takes us one step closer to accounting for these differences.

The polities emerging from the steppe have always been hybridised, as their very way of life has agriculture as a precondition for emergence. Steppe polities were,

furthermore, dependent upon sedentaries in order to sustain themselves. This hybridisation became more pronounced in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century, as Turkic dynasties broke through Transoxiana and became rulers over sedentary populations and, as such, dependent on sedentary bureaucrats and advisors for running the administration. Furthermore, the influence of the steppe tradition was renewed every now and then up until at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as newly-formed steppe confederations launched attacks and overran these earlier dynasties. Another exercise that kept established rulers of hybridised polities in touch with the steppe tradition was the need to frame their claims vis-à-vis steppe rulers in terms that were recognised by the nomadic soldiery. These would include tropes like the promising of more loot and the invocation of *qut*, the all-legitimising fortune or divine will.

Given widespread hybridisation, many polities who bear the marks of the steppe tradition have nonetheless put their steppe-nomadic past under erasure. This is, among other things, due to hybridisation itself, for over the last two hundred years, the European tradition has fastened on how a proper polity, a state, is by definition sedentary. Other variants were treated as previous incarnations of an evolutionary sequence. It followed that an affinity to the steppe came to denote backwardness. Denial notwithstanding, we have tried to demonstrate how contemporary Eurasian states have been influenced by the steppe tradition in ways that are still tangible. While the Eurasian empires may have perished, remnants of their statecraft linger. How else can one understand the political similarities that are to a large extent geographically co-extensive with the Mongol Empire? While the aforementioned hybridity has created a wide range of differences in the local particularities, and there are different ways of relating to this past in how it is written into official

historiography, the political traditions of polities ranging from the Mamluks in Egypt, via the Khazars and the Khipchak Khanate (a.k.a. the Golden Horde) in Russia, as well as the Mughals in India to the Mongols and the Yuan in China, make for a similarity in political traditions that can help to illuminate many similarities in the present. While a *Mongolophonie* would not have a wide membership, the legacy of a Eurasian imperial tradition is in evidence in a wide spectre of state practices and traditions in and around Eurasia.

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