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“We Have No Right to Force Our Religion on Others”: Civilisation, Modernity and the Discourse on Religious Tolerance in 19th Century Great Britain

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The idea of tolerance is generally understood today as one of the key concepts of ‘modern,’ ‘civilized’ and open minded Western society. Perceived to be directly linked to the achievements of the European Enlightenment, it often implies the victory of rationalism and respectfulness over hateful bigotry and fanaticism. It is the purpose of this article to challenge this largely positive conception of tolerance by pointing out the deeply paternalistic and hierarchical underpinnings of the term. It will be argued that, as an integral part of Protestant and liberal value systems, the notion of tolerance served as a powerful tool in the framework of late nineteenth century British imperialism, being depicted as an indicator for civilization, modernity and progress that rendered Western culture and Christianity superior to other—supposedly more intolerant and fanatic—forms of religious belief. By analyzing chosen newspaper accounts from *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian* between 1876 and 1900, the article seeks to show how this dichotomous view particularly affected the image of Islam, juxtaposing the tolerant, rational and even-tempered Briton with the bigoted and violent “Mussulman,” who had yet to learn how to properly treat other religions and who had to be taught how to properly control his emotions. It is the central premise of this article that by uncovering the ways in which the invocation of Muslim intolerance and fanaticism helped to justify British imperialism and colonial rule, we also enable ourselves to perceive more clearly the paternalistic and pejorative usage of the tolerance concept in public discourse today.

Introduction

The idea of tolerance is often understood today as one of the central values in contemporary Western societies.¹ It is both a cultural virtue that liberals and dem-

¹ UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance from 1995, accessed March 2, 2016, http://www.unesco.org/webworld/peace_library/UNESCO/HRIGHTS/124-129.HTM; by using the term “western”, I am largely referring to those societies in Europe, the Americas and Oceania that claim to share some form of common cultural heritage, which is generally deemed to be rooted in ancient Greco-Roman civilization and characterized by the Judeo-Christian tradition as well as by the achievements of the Enlightenment Era.

ocrats (as well as other public figures) claim for themselves when they publicly assure their own open-mindedness, multiculturalism and cosmopolitan outlook in political debates; and at the same time tolerance stands for a specific state of mind that is sometimes presumed to be absent in non-Western societies, but nevertheless is expected from migrants upon entering Western nations such as Germany, France or the UK.² Therefore the concept of tolerance functions not only as a tool for self-representation or identification but also as a means for indirectly labeling otherness and thus for the implicit reinforcement of cultural differences, whether they be ‘real’ or imagined. As such, the notion of tolerance represents a personal ethical principle as much as it stands for a wider political discourse.³ It is especially the latter dimension that this paper seeks to further explore.

The way in which the notion of tolerance for many individuals implies a rational and modern attitude—as well as the way in which its opposite, intolerance, conversely invokes the association with irrationality and backwardness—almost inevitably links the concept to the overall context of the civilization discourse, in which conceptions of the *self* are constructed through the invocation of an inferior *other*. Jürgen Osterhammel writes that “any ideal of civilization depends on what it is not: savagery, barbarism or even a different, but deficient manner of civilization.”⁴ Within this wider context, the idea of tolerance, at least in its modern shape, is often perceived by society today to be very deeply connected to the era of the European Enlightenment and the way in which it supposedly enabled a more rational and open-minded conceptualization of difference.⁵ Despite the fact that tolerance as a concept is far from being universally uncontested,⁶ it still seems to predominantly evoke quite positive connotations; as for many people, tolerance implies the overcoming of racial hatred and bigotry with rational thinking and a general attitude of respect.⁷

² Olaf Schwencke, “Das Europa der Toleranz,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, January 25, 2016, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/serie-kultur-und-fluechtlinge-das-europa-der-toleranz/12781916.html>; Janet Daley, “Don’t ‘teach’ British values – demand them,” *The Telegraph*, June 14, 2014, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/10899904/Dont-teach-British-values-demand-them.html>; Suzanne Daley and Alissa Rubin, “French Muslims Say Veil Bans Give Cover to Bias,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 2015, accessed March 2, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/world/europe/muslim-frenchwomen-struggle-with-discrimination-as-bans-on-veils-expand.html?_r=0.

³ Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 178.

⁴ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Europe, the “West” and the Civilizing Mission* (London: German Historical Institute London) 2006, 7.

⁵ The contemporary perception of Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise* is arguably one of the most striking examples for this linkage of the notion of tolerance with the era of Enlightenment. See: Rudolf Laufen, “Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Religionstheologie. Eine bleibende Herausforderung,” *Religionsunterricht an höheren Schulen* 45 (2002): 360, 362, 365.

⁶ See for example Rainer Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict: Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2–3, 10.

⁷ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 181–185.

Building on this assumption, this paper tries to uncover how, in the context of late nineteenth-century British civilization discourse, the notion of tolerance could be applied to mark religious difference and to reaffirm political power hierarchies—a tendency which, positive depictions of the idea notwithstanding, still characterizes discourses on toleration as a social ideal today. Analyzing the pejorative usage of the term in nineteenth-century Great Britain will thus help us to develop a better understanding of the nuances and complexities that surround contemporary debates on issues such as inter-religious coexistence and inter-cultural dialogue. In this regard, the paper focuses less on the actual practice of tolerance towards other creeds, but rather seeks to show how the rhetorical invocation or the call for tolerance was strategically used to establish such power structures. It will be argued that, as an integral part of Protestant and liberal value systems, the notion of tolerance served as a powerful tool in the overall narrative of British imperialism—mainly because the very concept of tolerance was seen as an indicator for progressiveness, modernity, rationality and peacefulness that separated Protestant Christianity and British civilization from its opposed irrational, intolerant and fanatic other.

This paper therefore seeks to analyze the public display of this dichotomy on the basis of chosen articles from *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*—two respected and influential newspapers—in the time period between 1876 and 1900. Representing two opposing political views—a rather conservative vs. a rather liberal outlook respectively—both journals help us to understand how the notion of tolerance was used by different authors in a similar vein across the political spectrum and, more generally, how the dualistic tolerance/intolerance imagery, as part of the wider civilization narrative, aided the construction of British identity, reassuring the British public of its moral superiority vis à vis members of other religions, cultures and ethnicities. By exploring this process, this paper thus contributes to the overall academic discussion on late nineteenth and early twentieth century civilization discourse and its historical consequences for the shaping of orientalist images of other religions; especially distorted images of Islam. In this context, it seeks to show that conceptions of Christian superiority and conceptions of tolerance are crucially linked. Other scholars, such as Wendy Brown, have already contributed to a more differentiated understanding of tolerance by pointing out the paternalistic tendencies of the term to imply a superior position of the one who *tolerates* over the one who simply *is tolerated*—discernible in the latter’s perceived lack of values and his presumed incapacity to somehow endorse them in the ‘right’ way.⁸ The concept of paternalism hence is of major importance to this study. It can be understood here as a form of power relationship in which claims of authority and superiority are based on the belief to act benevolently on

⁸ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 150, 186–190; for other studies see: Susan Mendus, ed., *The Politics of Toleration: Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

behalf of persons who are deemed to be in some way incapable of properly caring for themselves and thus dependent on some form of guidance or custodianship. In the context of late nineteenth-century civilization discourse, one factor indicating such a ‘superior’ standing was the virtue of tolerance, ultimately rendering the very lack thereof a sign of overall backwardness and inferiority. While the tolerant Western European man thus allegorically represented the authoritative father figure, the child figure in this power relationship was the intolerant, irrational non-European, supposedly unable to control their expressions of emotions in a manner that was seen as ‘childlike.’

The Rhetorical Function of Tolerance in the Discourse on Imperialism and Civilization

I want to begin the discussion of the different rhetorical contexts in which the notion of tolerance was used by first outlining some basic aspects of the overall discourse on imperialism and civilization. The first thing to consider thus is the structural shift in political and philosophical thought during the first half of the nineteenth century that Jennifer Pitts has identified as the “turn to empire” in British and French liberal ideology: Major thinkers like Jon Stuart Mill or Alexis de Tocqueville, she argues, were connected in their “increasingly secure belief that Europe’s progressive civilization granted Europeans the authority to suspend, in their relations with non-European societies, the moral and political standards they believed applied among themselves.”⁹ Pitts’ narrative thus contrasts a rather broad minded and anti-imperial outlook in eighteenth-century political thought—that not only included a feeling of doubt about the justice of European political and social orders, but also implied a certain amount of respect or even admiration for non-European societies¹⁰—with a far more racist and simplistic perception of otherness in the course of nineteenth-century ideologies. One such ideology was that of imperial liberalism, which increasingly justified imperial rule and colonialism with constructed distinctions between *civilized* and *savage* peoples, with hierarchical conceptions of progress and with general notions of Western superiority.¹¹ This general belief in belonging to a superior British nation or race¹² was then also

⁹ Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

¹⁰ For a more critical account see: Laurent Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic,” *Social History* 31 (2006): 1-14; and Sebastian Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique,” *American Historical Review* 117 (2012): 999-1027.

¹¹ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 14, 127-130, 136-137, 139-141, 160-162.

¹² To argue that public discourses in Western nations such as Britain were characterized by certain general ideas which shaped colonial and imperial policies does *not* imply, however, that there was ever something like a monolithic and homogenic imperial culture or a collective imperial identity that was uncontested and favored by the whole public. See: Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from*

essentially linked to the Protestant faith that, in combination with the perceived need to globally distribute the blessings of Western civilization (of which Protestantism was an integral part after all), helped to legitimate imperial rule as an altruistic and philanthropic mission of the British Empire.¹³ This essay will largely consider the discourse on tolerance/intolerance in relation to areas outside of the British Empire, such as Algeria and the Ottoman Balkan provinces. This illustrates the larger claim of the discourse reaching beyond the limits of the British colonies, and of British superiority not only over its colonial subjects, but over the rest of the world; with Britain seen by itself as the exemplar of civilisation. References to the civilized and progressive manner of Great Britain, contrasted with the supposed intolerance and fanaticism visible in Muslim societies, hence not only allowed for a very universal affirmation of global political dominance and overall moral superiority, but it also created a theoretical rationale for exerting influence and control over non-colonial sites and regions that were not formally British dominions.

The public atmosphere in Great Britain became increasingly hostile and indifferent towards other cultures and colonial subjects during the course of the nineteenth century, mainly due to the ascending importance attached to race and the civilization discourse.¹⁴ Yet, this did not mean that people could not also claim to be implementing a broader humanistic agenda, or as in Pitts’ words a “progressivist universalism.”¹⁵ Similarly, Ronald Hyam assures that “if it was not an ethical *empire*, it was not an empire without an ethical *policy*.”¹⁶ Partially the ambiguity Hyam refers to is derived from a very specific reception of eighteenth-century thought and the era of Enlightenment. Both were perceived as fundamental forces in the overall progress of Western science, technology, philosophy, politics and religion as they lay the groundwork for further European achievements in the decades to come, and thereby for the emergence of a stronger belief in Western, and specifically British, superiority towards other, less developed nations and peoples.¹⁷ One of the most obvious of such achievements that structurally implicated an imperial-superior standing, was arguably the abolition of slavery and Britain’s leading role in its worldwide legal implementation.¹⁸ Analogically one could argue now that the very notion of tolerance—alongside similar concepts like equality

the Mid-Nineteenth Century (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 5; Jürgen Osterhammel and Jan C. Jansen, *Kolonialismus: Geschichte, Formen, Folgen* (Munich: Beck, 2012⁷), 126.

¹³ Barbara Schwegmann, *Die Protestantische Mission und die Ausdehnung des Britischen Empires* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1990), 151–157.

¹⁴ Ronald Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28–30.

¹⁵ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 21.

¹⁶ Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire*, 31.

¹⁷ Annette Meyer, *Die Epoche der Aufklärung* (Munich: Oldenburg Akademieverlag, 2010), 90–92; Arnold Angenendt, *Toleranz und Gewalt: Das Christentum zwischen Bibel und Schwert* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2009⁵), 68–69.

¹⁸ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 16–17.

(as in the distribution of human rights) or freedom (as in the overcoming of despotism and tyranny)—was likewise seen as an essential achievement that facilitated societal progress.¹⁹ It was through the practice of tolerance, Britons could argue, that their country was able to end fanatic persecutions of minorities, fundamentalist thinking and religious wars against people seen as “infidels.” In this regard, then, tolerance constituted a framework that helped people to distinguish themselves from backwardness (that is, basically from practices no longer deemed to be socially appropriate) and hence to locate themselves in the modern world.²⁰

Tolerance as a Marker for the Progressiveness of Society

That the British public predominantly saw the concept of tolerance as such an achievement—one that was understood to be particularly linked to the overall context of Western civilization—can indeed be deduced from the accounts that I am going to address here. In a short bulletin regarding the election of the new liberal mayor of London, Henry Isaacs in 1889, *The Times* depicted the positive coverage of this election in the liberal German newspaper the *Freie Neue Presse*, from which it quoted:

Such intelligent, sober, continuous progress as Great Britain has accomplished is without any parallel in any European country and must remain a wonder to the world. The United Kingdom has attained to the apogee of tolerance and civilization, whereas on the Continent there are too many countries which show a tendency to revert to the middle ages, with their fanaticism and religious persecutions.²¹

Very clearly this account essentially links the two terms “civilization” and “tolerance,” which are not only depicted and displayed here as British accomplishments but are furthermore presented as markers for a clear opposition between the tolerance of Britain and the fanaticism prevailing in the nations beyond the Channel. The reference to the “middle ages” in this context, already hints to a common motif that is reappearing in the other articles as well: that of tolerance as an implication for civilizational progress.²² Wendy Brown has already pointed out

¹⁹ If we thus define tolerance as a virtue that not only referred to individuals but also to the wholesome of society, then tolerance could also be linked to the concept of civility, for both terms served as indicators “by which the different stages of development could be identified.” See: Margrit Pernau, “Great Britain: The Creation of an Imperial Global Order,” in *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth-Century Asia and Europe*, ed. Margrit Pernau et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 45.

²⁰ After all it is evident that already during the Enlightenment, such influential thinkers as Voltaire or Rousseau saw the concept of tolerance as a huge progress of their time. See: Rainer Forst, *Toleranz im Konflikt: Geschichte, Gehalt und Gegenwart eines umstrittenen Begriffs* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 380–384.

²¹ “Freie Neue Presse, Austria-Hungary,” *The Times*, November 1, 1889, 5.

²² A similar linkage of the two terms “civilization” and “tolerance” can be found in other articles as well, for example in an account of *The Times* from 1876 regarding the Ottoman

the rhetorical function of presenting tolerance as an integral part of the modern social order and, furthermore, as an essential feature of the historical progression of peoples towards an ever greater form of civilization, marked by such ideals as the proper rule of law, democracy, reason, or liberty.²³ It is this conception that also lay at the core of the discourse on tolerance in late nineteenth-century Great Britain.

Ultimately then, besides the display of one’s own progressiveness, the tolerance narrative was conversely also applied to mark the backwardness of other nations or other religions. In the fall of 1887 for instance, *The Times* launched a short series called “*The Progress of Islam*” in which, over the course of a few weeks, several letters were published that dealt with general political, cultural and religious questions concerning the practices of Islam in formal and informal British colonies. The overarching premise of all these letters was that they were all (mostly critical) responses to the polarizing and contested argument of Canon Isaac Taylor, who depicted the Christian mission in Africa and India as far less successful than the prospering missionary endeavors of Islam in these world regions.²⁴ Of the many critical accounts, I found the one of Liberal Protestant clergyman Malcolm MacColl particularly significant for the thesis of intolerance as a marker for backwardness examined here. In a passage on the Muslim school system in India he writes:

It is no exaggeration to say that it is for the most part a mixture of fanaticism, intolerance, and vice. [...] They [the Muslim colleges] sank into those more horrible crimes against nature which Christianity has extirpated from Europe, but which lurk in every great city in India.²⁵

This assertion of Muslim intolerance in the context of overall backwardness now has to be seen in MacColl’s intention to refute the argument of the aforemen-

suppression of the April Uprising in Bulgaria and the general use of violence, which states that “[c]ivilization and tolerance alone can heal the wounds of the country.” See: “The Times’ Prussian Correspondent, Russia and the War,” *The Times*, September 21, 1876, 4.

²³ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 179-180; see also: Gail Hershatter and Anna Tsing, “Civilization,” in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, ed. Tony Bennett et. al. (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 36.

²⁴ Isaac Taylor, “Church Reform and Church Defence,” *The Times*, October 26, 1887, 4; it seems rather telling that already in their announcement of the series that followed this letter, the editors themselves attacked Taylor’s position by devaluating it as a “perversion of figures and misrepresentation of facts”. Considering the “controversy” that Taylor had caused with his statements regarding the increase of Muslim converts in India, it seems likely that with this series the editors intended to prove to the world that Britain was still politically and culturally in charge in their most important colony. As 1887 furthermore marked the 30th anniversary of the Indian Mutiny, *The Times* probably also wanted to dispel British anxieties over another uprising and set the public’s mind at ease by (re-)asserting Britain’s cultural impact as well as its ability to maintain order and stability. See: “The Editors of The Times, Progress of Islam: Correspondence,” *The Times*, October 31, 1887, 9.

²⁵ Malcom MacColl, “The Progress of Islam- III,” *The Times*, November 07, 1887, 13.

tioned Isaac Taylor. Taylor's account of the success of Muslim missionaries is depicted as solely fixated on numbers and statistics, while MacColl highlights the importance of comparison:

The sole test is the comparative influence of Islam and Christianity respectively on the political and social condition of mankind. How do the two religions stand in that respect? Speaking broadly, the whole fabric of modern civilization has been the creation of Christianity.²⁶

And while Christianity has thus “purified and elevated” human nature, Islam “has been an unmitigated curse to the lands where it has ruled.”²⁷ In this attempt to prove the inability of Islam to properly implement civilization, MacColl thus portrays the Muslim faith as inherently hostile and intolerant towards other religions and races, which in turn leads him to detect within Islam a general inability for creating functioning societies. MacColl goes on to write that the “barrier to the social fusion of races” is generated by “Turkish vice,”²⁸ conveying his argument rather clearly. But while the intolerance prevailing in Islam is hence depicted as highly perilous, the intolerance of Christianity does not seem to bother MacColl at all. Depicting Christian episodes of intolerance—apparent for example in the trials against Galileo—as blunders of the past, he assures that “no Christian of sense would now admit that any proved truth or physical science can be inimical to the creed of Christendom.”²⁹ Ultimately, it seems that through this juxtaposition of Christianity and Islam MacColl—making use of the paternalistic narrative mentioned earlier—sought to justify British rule over its colonial as well as over non-colonial subjects and hence point out the need for Muslims more generally to be guided by morally superior Christians.

The overall narrative of assuring Islamic stagnation while simultaneously claiming Christian progressiveness in matters of tolerance was also apparent in accounts that were far less aggressive than MacColl's explanations. A letter written to the editors of *The Times* following the “*Progress of Islam*” series by a reader named Joseph Thomson focused particularly on the spread of Islam in Northern Africa and the role of Christian missionaries there. Despite sharing a rather positive view on Islam, with Thomson intending to support Taylor's argument and thus to defend Islam against baseless and simplistic accusations, his account still managed to display the Muslim faith as somehow less progressive than Christianity. He writes:

²⁶ MacColl, “Progress of Islam,” 13.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Have we not required something like 18 centuries to learn that we have no right to force our religion on others? What wonder, then, if ardent negro propagandists should seek occasionally to force the blessing of their religion on their unbelieving and stubborn brethren?³⁰

We can deduce from this statement that even such a man as Thomson, who regarded Islam as a true civilizing force³¹ in Africa, still found this religion to be in some way backward, at least when compared to Christianity. According to the paternalistic worldview of the author, Islam has yet to reach the superiority of Christianity because—being unable to tolerate people of other religions amongst them—it was not yet as developed. This then begs the solution of needing ‘guidance’ from the more advanced Christian West in order to attain the same level of civilisation. The paternalistic account of occasional outbursts of Muslim intolerance, visible in the practice of forced conversions, implies that the whole system of Islam somehow never underwent such transformative processes as the Reformation or the era of Enlightenment, in which Christendom supposedly became more rational, self-reflexive and disenchanting.³² In turn, the narrative of intolerance could have served accordingly as an important tool for the demarcating construction of Christian identity. Bearing the dangers of a teleological distortion of the past in mind, this is strongly reminiscent of several present day attempts to deprive Islam of its belonging to a modern era; attempts that currently not only amplify constructed notions of a backward Islam but also reinforce anachronistic and idealized perceptions of the European Enlightenment as an intellectual program that solely promoted rationality and the disenchantment of the world.³³ Acknowledging this analogy, we can perhaps understand these late nineteenth century discourses in question here, as some sort of underlying precursors to present day statements on Islam. In 2002, for instance, New York Times editorialist Thomas Friedman, paraphrasing Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, wrote that “Islam had not gone through the Enlightenment or the Reformation, which separated church from state in the West and prepared it to embrace modernity, democracy and tolerance.”³⁴

³⁰ Joseph Thomson, “Islam in Africa,” *The Times*, November 14, 1887, 4.

³¹ Thomson argues that where “Mahomedanism was established as the reigning religion” it has given “an impetus to the barbarous tribes which has produced the most astounding results. [...] In this manner have the seeds of civilization and Islam been scattered broadcast among numerous savage tribes” see: *Ibid.*

³² Angenendt, *Toleranz und Gewalt*, 68–69; Conrad, “Enlightenment,” 999, 1005; Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 229–268, 312–333; Francis Robinson, “Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia Since 1800,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 20 (1997): 2.

³³ See: Reinhard Schulze, “Was ist die Islamische Aufklärung,” *Die Welt des Islams* 36 (1996), 278–283.

³⁴ Thomas Friedman, “War of Ideas,” *The New York Times*, June 2, 2002, accessed August 28, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/02/opinion/war-of-ideas.html>.

Apart from his own perception of Islam as partially backward, Thomson's article is furthermore illuminating in the way that it paints a vivid picture of the prevailing public opinion about Islam at that time—a religion that, as he describes it, was generally seen by many as “propagated by means of fire and sword” and moreover characterized by its alleged dictum of “death or the Koran.”³⁵ The very fact that Thomson was therefore so eager to revise this “stereotyped notion” and to prove its obvious falseness, indicates how a great deal of people in the public discourse must have seen the religion of Islam: as a fanatic and intolerant creed that brutally forced its beliefs on others and somehow inherently promoted hostility and violence.³⁶ In spite of the fact that this was actually the opinion Thomson argued against, he indirectly helped to shape and further enforce it, mainly by emphasizing the notion of historical stagnation and the need for Islam to somehow catch up with modern civilization and the progress of Christianity. Therefore, although Thomson took a very sympathetic stand towards Islam and tried to deny or rather excuse the violence often associated with the religion, he remained a firm supporter of Christianity stating that: “No one is a more sincere admirer of the [Christian] missionary than I,” and adding that “[t]hey seem to me the best and truest heroes this nineteenth century has produced.”³⁷ It was exactly this eventual belief in the institution of the mission (as an instrument of general uplifting and as a means for the stimulation of progress) in which the accusation of intolerance could be used to point out that Islam was not yet equal to Christianity and Western civilization.

As the next account from *The Manchester Guardian* shows, the dichotomy between the tolerant vs. the intolerant, the rational vs. the irrational and the peaceful vs. the hostile could also be very well displayed in a different genre: that of the traveling report. Published in a two part account in August 1900, the traveler Ashley Ellis depicts his journey for unknown reasons into the Maghreb region, specifically to the Moroccan cities of Fez and Meknes. Apart from general—and deeply Orientalist—representations of landscape and local architecture, a great amount of space is dedicated to the description of Berber culture and its supposedly backwards, bigoted and intrinsic savage nature. Hence, right at the beginning, just after briefly depicting the daily routine of the bazaars, Ellis tells his audience:

³⁵ Thomson, “Islam in Africa,” 4.

³⁶ To be sure, this general public opinion was of course never uncontested. Contemporaries like the journalist William Howard Russel or the historian Robert Montgomery Martin early on tried to paint a more differentiated picture of other nations and religions that also pointed out the negative aspects of British rule. As, for instance, their critical accounts of the Indian Sepoy-Rebellion of 1857 showed, people indeed set out to highlight the barbaric crimes of British colonial officials towards their innocent subjects and thus relativized stereotyped notions of Muslims as inherently flawed individuals. See: Christopher Herbert, *War of no Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 65, 164.

³⁷ Thomson, “Islam in Africa,” 4.

Now and again, a fierce spirit of fanaticism may arouse them [and] as the other day in Fez, a passing fit of passion may result in an attack upon the infidel interloper, or the pastime of Jew-baiting, with its accompaniment of lust and plunder [and it is here where] the innate savagery of the human is seen.³⁸

Again, we encounter the motif of fanatic hostility and irrational aggression towards the infidel, which was depicted as the expression of an intrinsic savagery and thus as the complete opposite of civilization. As the “attack upon the infidel interloper” or the even more drastic term of the “pastime of Jew-baiting” implies, this intolerant attitude of the Muslims towards other beliefs for Ellis also included active, physical violence. There was hence no question to him as to what the destiny of the Maghreb and the Berber people was going to look like:

And the slow tide of Western progress, forcing back the prejudices and conservatism of Islam, will eventually overwhelm them; the neck of the Oriental was fated for the foot of the Western conqueror.³⁹

Similar to the other accounts already examined, the supposed inbred fanaticism, intolerance and aggression was depicted as undoubtedly inferior (“prejudices”) and backwards (“conservatism”), so that, in the end, Islam was believed to vanish before the tide of Western progress. But more than the other sources discussed so far, this travel report also skillfully contrasted the theme of Muslim hostility with the actual practice of a tolerant, respectful and civilized Christian behavior as a very visible display and rhetorical proof of Christianity’s moral superiority. As the report progresses further, Ellis recalled an episode where he and his travel companions encountered a religious teacher and an “angry mob” blocking their way:

A hostile teacher bars our path and, aided by the crowd, restrains our progress. ‘Sancto, sancto’, is all that is said, but it means that this dirty alley is forbidden to the dog of a Christian or the Jew. A little higher is a filthy little mosque in a gloomy byway, but it is a mosque by the grave of a revered teacher of Islam, and to respect the prejudices of this people, we turn aside.⁴⁰

Being able to control one’s emotions was an essential aspect during the nineteenth century of what it meant to be civilized. Individuals and societies falling prey to their animalistic and violent passions, incapable of containing their temper were understood to be inferior to those who managed to carefully monitor and reflect on their own feelings. Impulsiveness was therefore considered to be a weakness and people not in control of their behavior needed to be taught to at-

³⁸ Ashley Ellis, “Sketches in Barbary,” *The Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1900, 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

tain a higher level of civilization through learning by example—much as a child does from their father. In a similar way, British imperialists justified their rule as paternal, and more broadly, their superiority as Christians over Muslims. The way in which members of other cultures behaved, hence represented an important criterion for determining how far progressed they were and what stage of civilization they had attained to.⁴¹ It is this thinking that also guided Ellis in his writing: In spite of the hostility perceived towards himself, he remains calm and rational, and, most importantly, he never loses control over his passions and emotions. Tolerant as he is, Ellis even respects the “prejudices” of these inferior people, showing, in turn that he not only participates in the overall discourse on tolerance, but also that he—as an individual—cherishes and practices the toleration of beliefs he does not agree with. Here the notion of inferiority is explicitly linked to Muslim intolerance as apparent in the perpetuation of religious segregation. This directly aided the construction of a paternalistic dichotomy between Christianity and Islam, or more specifically, between the rational, controlled and tolerant Briton on the one side and the irrational, uncontrolled, intolerant Moroccan on the other.

Apart from the vague assertion that someday Western progress will force back the “conservatism of Islam,” Ashley’s account does not seem to include any real political implication, such as active instructions for a specific British foreign policy based on the made assumptions of the Berber people’s nature. Other articles, however, went further than solely orientalist constructions of the *other* and placed Muslim intolerance explicitly in a (geo)political context. With regards to the “serious rising of the Arab tribes of Northern Africa,” the unknown author of the next article from September 1881 set out to “discuss the possibility of a general outburst of fanaticism throughout the Moslem world.”⁴² His enquiry needs to be seen in relation to recent developments in the region at the time: Only a few weeks earlier, the Sudan had experienced the advent of the millenarian Mahdi Uprising, which was directed against the Egyptian occupation of the region.⁴³ In Egypt itself the nationalistic Urabi movement, active since 1879, threatened to put an end to the European—particularly British—influence in the financial sector that resulted from the country’s increasing incumbrance and the eventual bankruptcy in 1875.⁴⁴ From Britain’s point of view, the disturbances during the autumn of 1881 were alarming as they entailed the possibility of a change in the balance of power that negatively affected the Empire’s economic and strategic interests in the region, especially in Egypt, which officially became a protectorate only one year lat-

⁴¹ See: Margrit Pernau and Helge Jordheim, “Introduction,” in *Civilizing Emotions*, 8–11, 14–18; as well as: Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf Into Middle Classes. Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 246–265.

⁴² Anonymous, “The Jihad,” *The Times*, September 10, 1881, 4.

⁴³ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 2010⁵), 642–643.

⁴⁴ Johanna Pink, *Geschichte Ägyptens: Von der Spätantike bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 2014), 158–164.

er. It is against this backdrop that the unknown author conducted his enquiry of the Pan-Islamic movement in Africa and the possibility of a Jihad waged against Christianity and the West. Destined to deliver a thorough analysis, he considered it necessary to “go back to the origin of Islam itself and [to] trace the history of Mahomedan warfare through the different epochs until the present day.”⁴⁵ One of his first appraisals was the following:

The astounding and rapid success, both religious and military, of Mahomedanism [...], naturally encouraged the idea that a vital principle of union exists in the system of Islam itself which needs only to be called into action once again to develop the old irresistible spirit of aggression. The world might well shrink from the contemplation of a simultaneous outbreak of murderous fanaticism among millions who profess the creed of the Prophet of Arabia.⁴⁶

Hence, he continues, “dangers do exist from Mussulman discontent or enthusiasm [...]”.⁴⁷ This reference to an intrinsic “system of Islam” and the “old irresistible spirit of aggression” implies once more that the perceived hostility and intolerance towards other creeds was seen as somehow built in to the religion itself and therefore very unlikely to change, as the example of the “Bedouin or the Arab” shows, who “had preserved their patriarchal simplicity of manners unchanged since the remotest times [...]”.⁴⁸ Unlike the other sources, though, this particular article explicitly linked Muslim fanaticism—in the form of a probable Jihad—to an actual political threat. Regardless of the author’s perception that the possibility of a war to be carried out from the Ottoman Empire or to be proclaimed by a majority of Indian Muslims was nearly nonexistent, he nevertheless expected equivalent dangers arising from Northern Africa, stating that there are several countries where:

The proclamation of a *jehád* [sic] would probably meet with an immediate response [...]. The Arabs who migrated to Africa [...] have to the present day preserved their Arab customs, traditions, and genealogies more intact than any others of the race, except for those of Arabia itself.⁴⁹

It is therefore very probable for any “powerful Moslem saint or chief – and there are many such in Morocco, Tunis, and Algiers – [to] preach the extermination of the Kafirs [...]”.⁵⁰ In this context then, it seems important to note that the dangers of a Jihad were not simply understood in terms of religion per se. It was

⁴⁵ Anonymous, “The Jihad,” 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

rather a combination of an inbuilt religious intolerance towards other creeds and a special form of aggressiveness inherent to the Arab race, suggesting that intolerance was also defined in terms of ethnicity. The author thus assured that the execution of a Jihad would probably “not be strictly a ‘Pan-Islamic’ movement, [...] but it would be a universal Arab movement” which would “give rise to inexpressible horrors of war and bloodshed in western Africa itself, and it would attract sufficient sympathy in other Mahomedan countries to prove a serious danger to the general peace.”⁵¹ As the Jihad therefore also indirectly affected the Western world, it was the aim of the author to justify colonialism in northern Africa as a means to compensate for the lacking sense of rationalism, peacefulness and tolerance on the side of Islam, and thus to limit the dangers arising from such a deficiency:

France has earned the gratitude of the world by converting a nest of pirates and slavers into a peaceful and productive country, and she has, no doubt, a right to protect her Algerian frontiers.⁵²

As the remark on the general uplifting of “pirates and slavers” suggests, the author—while actually speaking about French accomplishments—also established a link to the abolishment of slavery as an overall humanistic merit of Britain. Accordingly, the warning against a possible Jihad, which necessarily implied the call for religious calmness, tolerance and rationality, was then furthermore instrumentalized in the civilization discourse:

Morocco and Tunis must also, of course, be taught that the preservation of order and the repression of bloodthirsty fanaticism are the conditions of their admission into the band of civilized nations.⁵³

In this overall civilization context then, the call for tolerance and rationalism was essentially embedded in the notion of the British Empire as a global forthbringer of justice and peace. Once again, we encounter the paternalistic tendency inherent to the accusation of Muslim intolerance, indicating an urgent need for the British to “teach” these nations what they seem to be incapable of achieving on their own, namely how to properly attain some degree of civilization; a claim that would be expanded in Egypt the following year when it was declared a British protectorate.

However, besides such discussions on Pan-Islamism and the possibility of a Jihad as explicit foils for Muslim intolerance, there were of course other contexts in which the (geo)political dimension of the tolerance discourse came to light. One historical topic that undoubtedly belongs to this category was the public debate

⁵¹ Anonymous, “The Jihad,” 4..

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

on the “Eastern Question”⁵⁴; a topic that—especially after the “Bulgarian atrocities” in 1876 and the subsequent outbreak of war in the Balkans—polarized the whole of Britain, where debates amplified the domestic conflict between Liberals and Conservatives concerning the future of the declining Ottoman Empire and general questions regarding the Nationalist movements in the Balkan region.⁵⁵ In terms of media coverage, major events like the Bulgarian April Uprising or the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire were often discussed in a much broader way and therefore often rhetorically functionalized to fit specific political agendas.⁵⁶ In June 1876 for instance, after news of the Batak massacre emerged, *The Manchester Guardian* published an article by the French journalist John Lemoinne from *Journal des débats* as part of a round-up on the opinions of the foreign press on what they called the “Eastern Imbroglia.”⁵⁷ Lemoinne, like many of his English Liberal contemporaries, condemned Ottoman rule over their Balkan protectorates and thus supported national independence in these regions. His argument for “progressive emancipation” in Bosnia and Herzegovina is therefore backed up and justified by the affirmation of an overall inability on the side of the Ottoman government to appropriately maintain rule and order over their foreign dominions:

The Turks can only maintain their dominion on the condition of their remaining Turks; they must draw on their fanaticism for their vitality. They hold it a dogma that their race is superior to every other race. Their intolerance is quite different from the intolerance of other creeds; [...] such a thing as social equality between a giaour and themselves they cannot admit.⁵⁸

Lemoinne uses this invocation of Muslim intolerance and fanaticism to convince his readers of the supposed inefficiency of Ottoman rule over its protectorates and, therefore has to back up his own thesis regarding the necessity of national emancipation; hence the clear linkage between the concept of intolerance and distinctive political implications. Theoretically-speaking, the general intention to discredit both Islam and Ottoman authority was also about the establish-

⁵⁴ Under the topic of the “Eastern Question” contemporaries discussed the diplomatic implications of the increasing economic and political instability of the Ottoman Empire between the late 18th and the early 20th century. Yet, the “Eastern Question” was not only confined to a public debate, as it also refers to a situation of actual power struggle, in which the European nations attempted to safeguard their respective strategic and economic interests in the face of Ottoman decline. See for example: Alexander Lyon Macfie, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁵⁵ Florian Keisinger, *Unzivilisierte Kriege im zivilisierten Europa? Die Balkankrise und die öffentliche Meinung in Deutschland, England und Irland 1876–1913* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008), 32–37; Michelle Tusan, “Britain and the Middle East: New Historical Perspectives on the Eastern Question,” *History Compass* 8 (2010), 213.

⁵⁶ Keisinger, *Unzivilisierte Kriege*, 37.

⁵⁷ John Lemoinne, “The Eastern Imbroglia,” *The Manchester Guardian*, June 7, 1876, 6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

ment of religious hierarchies. The Christian insurrections in the context of the April Uprising were depicted as justified, while simultaneously it was assured that the only way Turkey could react to these insurrections was “by appealing to Mussulman fanaticism,”⁵⁹ which was supposed to prove the “backwardness” of Ottoman rule. In this regard then, societies viewed as suffering under the yoke of Muslim intolerance were also believed to be necessarily unjust as the already mentioned nonexistence of “social equality” between Muslims and unbelievers suggests. Lemoinne concluded this verdict with the assertion that especially in provinces “where the Christians form a majority of the population and the whole of the administration is in the hands of the Turks, neither justice, nor order, nor peace can be regarded as safe,”⁶⁰ thus merging political and religious matters into one over-encompassing narrative of Islam as generally incompatible with the idea of modern society. Lemoinne seems to suggest here that, due to their inherent “fanaticism” and “intolerance,” Muslims were unable to establish a social order, similar to that prevailing in “civilized” nations, in which religious minorities were regarded as equal citizens with equal rights and duties.

To Lemoinne all these negative aspects associated with Turkish rule justified the general implementation of national independence in the Balkans. But inevitably, he also developed a clear political opinion of Turkey itself. In a very liberal manner he opposed the conservative notion of preserving the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire⁶¹ and furthermore challenged the belief in rescuing the “sick man of Europe” by saying that “we should not entertain any illusions as to the possibility of reforms in the Turkish Government, if even the Government itself were honestly desirous to do so.”⁶² To demonstrate the unwillingness of the Ottoman government, Lemoinne expands the overall narrative of Muslim intolerance and fanaticism by explicitly adding questions concerning civilization:

It is quite a mistake to form an opinion of the Turks in general from the few specimens of Turks of the modern school, who learn foreign languages, travel all over the world [and] use knife and fork [...]. In the eyes of true believers these liberal Turks are regarded pretty much [...] as heretics far worse than infidels.⁶³

In Lemoinne’s opinion there not only was almost no civilization and progress to be found in Turkey; far worse, the few people who did belong to a “modern school”—those who could facilitate positive societal change after all—were treated as foes and outsiders. It is this intolerant treatment of both foreign and domestic Turkish subjects that leads Lemoinne to his conviction that “Turkey cannot

⁵⁹ Lemoinne, “Eastern Imbroglia,” 6.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ See: Keisinger, *Unzivilisierte Kriege*, 15.

⁶² John Lemoinne, “The Eastern Imbroglia,” 6.

⁶³ Ibid.

gain strength by bastard imitations of outward forms of European civilization.”⁶⁴ His main concern in this regard is thus the Ottoman failure to recognize the responsibilities that arise from the civilizing task: “To draw up paper constitutions [...] is easy enough, but some attention should be paid to the country, and above all to the people that have to be dealt with.”⁶⁵ According to Lemoinne, it is exactly this proper dealing with the people—at home and abroad—that Turkey (in contrast to Britain, which spread the word of Protestant Christianity and treated its colonial subjects with tolerance and respect), simply cannot guarantee. Lemoinne’s ultimate conclusion thus seems to be that the Sublime Porte’s apparent intolerance, fanaticism and altogether uncivilized behavior disqualifies them as imperial rulers, because they cannot provide the paternal “care” that is expected from sovereigns who want to properly govern a given populace.

So far, the political dimension of the concept of tolerance has only been discussed in terms of actors who, although contributing to ongoing debates and thus shaping the public discourse, wrote from outside the actual political sphere. As an argument, however, the rhetorical dichotomy of tolerant vs. intolerant was also used by members of Parliament. In 1878 for example, after the war between Russia and the Ottomans ended, the House of Lords discussed the question of whether it was necessary or not for Britain to militarily partition and occupy parts of Turkey to gain a strategical advantage towards Russia’s growing imperial aggression. By the end of this debate (which was published by *The Times*) the Liberal Lord Northbrook shared his opinion on this specific subject, in which he opposed the idea of intervention. Unlike others, such as the Marquess of Salisbury, Robert Gascoyne, who argued “that it is rather a desirable thing; that what we have done in India could also be done in Asiatic Turkey; [...] that if we did annex it, it would add to the strength of the Empire,” Northbrook explicitly pointed to the “wretched state” of Turkey, which—at least at the present state—would render British rule and the implementation of progress a rather intricate undertaking.⁶⁶ Hence, not only would a British occupation be difficult, it would also pose a “serious danger” to imperial rule itself. The very “wretched state,” which was supposed to prove this skeptic assertion, resulted—again—mainly from the allegedly intolerant and fanatic Muslim mindset:

Mahomedanism is a religion which chafes under foreign rule, especially the rule of a nation whose religion is not Mahomedan. A really religious Mahomedan cannot be content with other than Mahomedan rule.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Lemoinne, “Eastern Imbroglia,” 6.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Anonymous, “Parliamentary Intelligence,” *The Times*, July 19, 1878, 6.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

What makes this statement regarding the Muslim's general inability to tolerate non-Muslim rulers so valuable to our course of inquiry is not the statement itself, but rather the whole context of its publication. It shows that the discourse displayed so far also played a part in the shaping of *actual* politics; it proves that the rhetorical focus on tolerance and intolerance constituted a tool for the hierarchical division between Britain and their Oriental counterparts that could even influence the course of international diplomacy and geopolitics on the highest levels. In other words, the dichotomy tolerant vs. intolerant, as part of the broader civilization discourse, not only helped to construct a certain way of thinking about other people, nations and religions, but also influenced the way state officials justified and enforced their political agendas.

Conclusion

Ultimately, what these separate accounts show is that towards the end of the nineteenth century the notion of tolerance was embedded into a larger conceptual network that facilitated the overall public recognition of British progress and superiority, as the notion of tolerance enabled British Protestants and Liberals to define themselves as more civilized and modern than members of other nations, religions or ethnicities. Accordingly, to the British public, represented here at different levels by people like MacColl, a member of the general public; Ellis, a commissioned travel writer; or Northbrook, an aristocratic politician; the conception of British civilization included a certain degree of rationality as indispensable for overall human interaction. Therefore civilization, for them, almost inevitably included the liberal belief that respectful tolerance towards other cultures, religions and nations was of utmost importance for the proper functioning of the progressive and modern society.⁶⁸ The development from the backwardness of Medieval Europe to the prosperity of nineteenth-century Britain, in their eyes, convincingly indicated that. Non-European societies where the evolutionary conception of civilization was not present and where overall conditions reminded these Liberals rather of the unfree European Middle Ages with their religious intolerance and fanaticism,⁶⁹ were therefore regarded as incapable to abolish such backward aspects of life and were thus seen as necessarily inferior.

This dichotomy tended to enforce a very paternalistic understanding of the term tolerance, in which the image of the benevolent father taking care of the immature child supported the construction and justification of British civilizational superiority as well as the Empire's claim to rule over foreign territories and peoples.

⁶⁸ Considering that civilization was at the turn of the century also defined by Pear's Encyclopedia as "progress in the art of living together," there can be no longer a doubt as to the crucial part of tolerance for the British conception of civilization. See Pernau, "Great Britain," 47.

⁶⁹ I am strictly referring here to the nineteenth-century retrospective perception of medieval Europe, not an accurate historiographical representation.

Societies depicted as prone to an intolerant treatment of other religions and fanatic outbursts of violence, in the eyes of the British, could not be left to themselves as they needed to be taught a more “civilized” behavior. This paternalistic mindset presented the one who practiced tolerance (the Protestant Briton) as the superior, whereas it identified the one who just passively received the generosity of being tolerated (the Muslim Arab) with some sort of defectiveness that led to his condition of being in need to be tolerated. So, by forcefully contrasting their own tolerant world view with the intrinsic intolerance of Islam, the Liberal and Protestant actors under scrutiny here effectively reinforced a hierarchical dualism that characterized Protestant Christianity as a progressive and modern religion which (unlike Islam) underwent the process of purification from irrationality during the Enlightenment era⁷⁰ and that could hence bear the expression of tolerance towards less progressive and inferior creeds. This implicated a very clear position of strength and superiority on the side of the Protestant Britons. Accordingly, the rhetorical usage of the tolerance narrative, as part of the overall civilization discourse, inevitably shaped and accompanied various political agendas concerning colonial matters and foreign affairs: Tolerance ultimately underpinned a general “logic of rule”⁷¹ inherent to the imperial system by justifying the legitimacy of British imperial authority over politically, culturally and religiously “inferior” subjects. Whether in the case of Egypt, India, or the Ottoman Empire—the accusation of uncontrolled intolerance and fanaticism on behalf of Muslim populations and Muslim governments enabled Britain to vindicate its imperialistic (military or diplomatic) interventions in these world regions.

In my opinion, this paternalistic tendency, in part, still shapes the way we use the notion of tolerance in public discourse today. More than ever we need to acknowledge the hierarchical implications inherent to the term and its tendency to highlight the differences it actually aims to render invisible. Studying the similarities between late nineteenth-century and today’s arguments concerning Islam’s alleged intolerance as opposed to the ideal of tolerance in Christian tradition shows that, if we really want to achieve mutual acceptance and the implementation of true equality, we have to essentially rethink our understanding of tolerance as a means of interaction with Islam. As long as we maintain to think of Muslim believers to be one step behind in their way of handling religious and cultural difference and as long as we, simultaneously, fail to acknowledge that the Western way of talking about and practicing tolerance implies the regulation of something that is perceived to be in some way hazardous, then we will eventually also fail to regard Islam and Middle Eastern cultures as something undoubtedly equal to Christianity and Western civilization.

⁷⁰ See: Angenendt, *Toleranz und Gewalt*, 59–78.

⁷¹ See: Catherine Hall, ed. *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 7.