

# THREE WAYS OF LOCATING THE GLOBAL: MICROHISTORICAL CHALLENGES IN THE STUDY OF EARLY TRANSCONTINENTAL DIPLOMACY\*

Reflections, echoes, connections: the sixteenth century abounds with transcontinental phenomena carrying the potential to challenge Eurocentric narratives in global history. Even as we look back on the now substantial historiography of early modern global flows and connections, new and surprising aspects catch our eye every time we delve into the sixteenth century. We may take almost any single year — for example, 1546, not a particularly remarkable one in the making of the new global order — and still be confronted with a series of events calling for novel enquiries into big, globally relevant processes. In Yucatán, 1546 brought a renewal of warfare following the conclusion of one of the most violent campaigns of Spanish territorial conquest at the end of the previous year.<sup>1</sup> In Gujarat, an Ottoman-led coalition besieged the Portuguese fort of Diu, set up a decade earlier as a result of negotiations with violent turns that had led the sultan Bahadur Shah to concede this key Indian Ocean port. The siege — the second of its sort, preceded by a first one in 1538 — forced the *Estado da Índia* to muster all its military and diplomatic might to defend itself. This involved ships and troops brought in from outposts including the semi-official Portuguese trading community of Meliapor, which had prospered on the Coromandel Coast of south India by participating in trade with south-east Asian ports such as Patani and Melaka.<sup>2</sup> The siege of Diu may also be read in connection with the dynamics of the Ottoman campaigns in Hungary at the time and the suspension of hostilities

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Restall, *Maya Conquistador* (Boston, 1998), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2009), ii, 136; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 1990).

in Italy, linked to the Anglo-French truce agreed in the Treaty of Ardres. Further events might be added to the picture, but with every addition, the challenge increases to explain what such concurrences should mean to us as historians.

Beyond the obvious problem of causality, another, less explored issue emerges here. How do we assess the relevance of local occurrences (say, a conflict between Muslim, Hindu and Christian merchants in the port town of Diu) for the unfolding of global processes (say, the clashing of Turkish and Portuguese forces in the Indian Ocean, or possibly an even wider conflict between Muslim and Christian forces)? Inversely, what may the influence of the latter have been on the former? To what extent is there scope, in such contexts, for the writing of microhistories of global developments, microhistories of the construction of a global political sphere, or indeed 'microhistories of the global'?<sup>3</sup> In the present article, I wish to explore three possible ways of approaching these questions. In the first section, I will embrace a relatively abstract heuristics of the global as an emerging space where commensurable 'local' cultures suddenly connected with each other diplomatically across very long distances.<sup>4</sup> I will summon cases from parts of the early modern world that shared an exposure to the expanding networks of the Portuguese. The tone is here optimistic regarding the possibilities of culturally distinct but commensurable, locally or regionally active powers meeting diplomatically on an emerging global stage.<sup>5</sup>

In the second section, I will zoom in on local power struggles to explain in more detail why elites across the Atlantic and Indian Ocean regions reached out to the Portuguese through diplomacy, and vice versa. The emphasis will shift to a 'bottom-up' perspective where we can see agents of power relying on supra-local, increasingly transcontinental, developments to affirm themselves locally. The suggestion is that long-distance diplomatic activities paid greater symbolic and material dividends to rulers in their struggles

<sup>3</sup> I am here seizing on a broader suggestion given in the title of the volume *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the 21st Century*, ed. Maxine Berg (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Like most historians and geographers, I struggle to settle for an absolute definition of the local, especially on grounds of its dynamic relations with the regional. On the close interdependence between these categories of enquiry, see P. J. Taylor, 'Global, National and Local', in R. Johnston and M. Williams (eds.), *A Century of British Geography* (Oxford, 2003); on the regional in particular, see R. Bin Wong, 'Regions and Global History', in Maxine Berg (ed.), *Writing the History of the Global*.

<sup>5</sup> I take the term 'diplomacy', not used in the period under study, to signify the management of relations between rulers. This adapts the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of diplomacy as 'the management of international relations by negotiation' and 'the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys'.

against internal competitors than is generally recognized, and that this again offers potential for the writing of microhistories of transcontinental diplomacy or, more ambitiously, the global itself as a locally grounded reality. Together, the first and second sections suggest that transcontinental diplomacy developed in close connection with local power dynamics, whilst local processes of royal affirmation, often set by historians in the framework of the emerging dynastic and proto-national state, also clearly call for an appreciation in connection with a nascent global outlook.

In the third section, the focus will shift to the methodological and ethical limits of theorizing the interdependence of the local and the global. I will ask the reader to dwell on the appearance of imbalances within the emerging global diplomatic field. Regardless of the fast growth of transcontinental diplomacy during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, there is something about the nascent notion of the global that suggests it cannot be fully grasped as a category if we only insist on its interdependence with local struggles across the world. The global may have taken shape differently in distinct local imaginaries. In Iberian minds in particular, it came to sit *on top of* the local and of other, non-Iberian ideas of 'world' and 'globe' in ways that were novel, fed by a fresh combination of perceived centrality, geographical abstraction, and control over diplomatic and other networks spanning four continents. The global may thus have started a life of its own in some European minds, presaging the development of hegemonic ambitions in the longer term. Again, this opens doors to microhistorical approaches to the actions and ideas that transformed the world from 1500 onwards. Any of the three approaches may be valid in itself, but the first two cannot quite explain the making of the world we live in if we do not also engage with the third.

### I

#### BLURRING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

Beyond the 1546 events already mentioned, one unnoticed until very recently occurred in eastern Sri Lanka.<sup>6</sup> Quite possibly oblivious to the Yucatán wars, and probably only partly aware of the full drama unfolding around Diu, a friar carrying diplomatic letters from the Sinhalese king of Kandy, in the highlands of Sri Lanka, to the Portuguese viceroy, usually residing at Goa, was intercepted by a local warlord as he traversed the eastern lowlands of the island. We know the letter carrier as 'friar Simão of Coimbra', and the intercepting lord

<sup>6</sup> For the full details of this episode, presented from a different angle, see Zoltán Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires: Imperial Portugal, Sri Lankan Diplomacy, and the Making of a Habsburg Conquest in Asia* (Oxford, 2018), 132–4.

as the ‘king of Batticaloa’.<sup>7</sup> Friar Simão was a Franciscan, presumably born or educated in the town of Coimbra in central Portugal, and potentially benefiting in Sri Lanka from perceived similarities between his social condition and that of Buddhist monks.<sup>8</sup> The anonymous king (‘rei’ is the title used in the surviving Portuguese documents, rendering the widely used term *raja*) was a little king whose seat of power was at, or close to, the modern town of Batticaloa, a small Lankan port facing the Bay of Bengal.<sup>9</sup> Friar Simão was coming from Kandy, a freshly emerging focus of Portuguese–Sri Lankan diplomatic interactions. Diplomatic relations between Kandy and the Portuguese had begun in 1542–3, after three and a half decades of transcontinental diplomacy inaugurated in 1506 by the highest-ranking Lankan monarchs, the kings of Kotte near Colombo.<sup>10</sup>

In 1546, the king of Batticaloa felt it was his turn to enter the diplomatic game with the European newcomers. He was interested not so much in the letters coming from Kandy, but in the letter carrier himself. He wished to use friar Simão as his own agent to connect diplomatically with the Portuguese *Estado*. And by doing so, he conformed to a pattern. Contrary to modern nationalist narratives that have pitched ‘unpatriotic’ rulers engaging with the Portuguese against others who ‘resisted’, we now know that virtually every major figure of authority in the island attempted to co-operate with foreign powers — be they the Portuguese, the Mappilas, or the larger, land-based south Indian polity of Tanjore.<sup>11</sup> Batticaloa was one of the less important of a

<sup>7</sup> Simão de Coimbra to John III, Goa, 25 December 1546, published in Georg Schurhammer and Ernst August Voretzsch, *Ceylon zur Zeit des Königs Bhuvaneka Bahu und Franz Xavers 1539–1552* (Leipzig, 1928), 431–3.

<sup>8</sup> Alan Strathern, ‘Os Piedosos and the Mission in India and Sri Lanka in the 1540s’, in Roberto Carneiro and Artur Teodoro de Matos (eds.), *D. João III e o Império: Actas do Congresso Internacional* (Lisbon, 2004), 855–64.

<sup>9</sup> On ‘little kings’, see Georg Berkemer and Margret Frenz, ‘Little Kingdoms or Princely States? Trajectories towards a (Theoretical) Conception’, *Indian Historical Review*, xxxii, 2 (2005), 104–21; and Bernhard Schnepel and Georg Berkemer, ‘History of the Model’, in Georg Berkemer and Margret Frenz (eds.), *Sharing Sovereignty: The Little Kingdom in South Asia* (Berlin, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> On the Portuguese involvement in Sri Lanka during this period, see Alan Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land* (Cambridge, 2007); and Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires*.

<sup>11</sup> For an exploration of some of these ties in a slightly later period, see Gananath Obeyesekere, ‘Between the Portuguese and the Nāyakas: The Many Faces of the Kandyan Kingdom, 1591–1765’, in Zoltán Biedermann and Alan Strathern (eds.), *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* (London, 2017), 161–77. On the deeper history of tactical princely exile in south India, see Zoltán Biedermann, ‘Cosmopolitan Converts:

large, hierarchically organized constellation of realms that, together, formed the ‘galactic polity’ of Lanka.<sup>12</sup> All rulers in the island followed the same principles of ‘tributary overlordship’, from the high kings of Kotte (often referred to as ‘emperors’ in European sources) through the middling kings of Kandy, Jaffna and Sitawaka (themselves sometimes aspiring to topple the Kotte overlord and take the imperial throne), through smaller lords or ‘little kings’ including the *rei de Batticaloa*, to even more remote figures including the ‘king of Yala’, apparently paying tribute to Batticaloa, and village chiefs operating at a level not touched upon by any written sources for this period. I have argued elsewhere that the way in which the system relied on similar mechanisms of tribute and homage at its various levels made it not just internally flexible, but also externally connectable to analogous systems built on layered or nesting suzerainties elsewhere, such as the Portuguese monarchy.<sup>13</sup>

Batticaloa is, in this context, a place easily ignored. This little kingdom is as remote as it gets in the Luso-Asian archive, the most important corpus of textual and visual sources for many parts of maritime Asia in the sixteenth century. Between 1506, the date of the first documented arrival of Portuguese ships on the opposite coast at Colombo, and 1546, the year friar Simão was intercepted, there is not a single mention in any surviving text of what was going on in Batticaloa.<sup>14</sup> Suddenly then, appearing out of the dark in a flash of light, we see the local king ready not just to send some merchandise to a better-known part of Asia, but to request a political alliance with the distant monarch of Portugal. To be sure, the narrative that has reached us is lacking in detail and texture when compared to sources on other parts of the Indian Ocean region, not to mention the sources traditionally used by microhistorians in Europe. But it does, in this specific context, throw an extraordinarily bright light on an otherwise entirely obscure place. And because the quick glance thus afforded suggests a number of similarities with other, more abundantly documented diplomatic encounters in Sri Lanka, we are in a position

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The Politics of Lankan Exile in the Portuguese Empire’, in Biedermann and Strathern (eds.), *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History*, 141–60.

<sup>12</sup> On this concept, see Alan Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion*, 27–30; and Stanley J. Tambiah, ‘The Galactic Polity in Southeast Asia’, in *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires*, 12–36 and 47–54.

<sup>14</sup> Some references to the prospering agrarian economy of the area, based on later sources, can be found in the *University of Peradeniya History of Sri Lanka* [continuing the *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, i] (Peradeniya, 1995), ii, 37 and 42.

to connect and compare on a larger scale. The 1546 events thus appear both extraordinary and normal at the same time.<sup>15</sup>

For a king in a place such as Batticaloa, it was crucial to keep an eye on the diplomatic practices that were propping up rulers further above — and at times further below — in the Lankan hierarchy. The intercepting of a Portuguese envoy by the king of Batticaloa in 1546 stemmed from an acute perception that the combined diplomatic engagements of Kandy and Kotte with the Portuguese had created a situation where lesser lords also needed to make contact with the *Estado* — and could do it by following the same, familiar mechanisms. Engaging with a new, potential overlord certainly posed some challenges, especially at the level of diplomatic language. The king of Batticaloa asked the authorities in Goa for recognition as a ‘vassal and friend in arms’ (*‘vasalo, e amigo em armas del-Rey de Portugal’*), a rather idiosyncratic formula combining three distinct terms used in Portuguese diplomacy to designate different types of allies: vassals, friends and brothers-in-arms.<sup>16</sup> But, clearly, the details of Portuguese diplomatic culture mattered relatively little in Batticaloa at that moment. The point was to establish a diplomatic connection based on a resonance between two polities deemed to speak commensurable languages.

The request was made in combination with a declaration — following similar moves by a number of Lankan princes in the 1540s — that the king would be open to embracing the Catholic faith if duly supported by the *Estado*. Friar Simão had, according to his own account, been carrying a cross in his hand as he walked through the land, and had been asked by the king of Batticaloa about its meaning. The friar had explained the religious significance of the Holy Cross, but also told the king of how it was part of the Portuguese monarch’s coat of arms, and a symbol of his ‘magnificence and power’ — presumably gesturing towards what the Portuguese already saw as the global mandate of John III (r. 1521–57), a point to which we shall return below. In an attempt to capture the positive momentum, the local king declared that henceforth the king of Portugal could consider the kingdom of Batticaloa as if it were his own. He could, for example, have ships built there and use all the available wood free of charge. It was clear that there would be no Portuguese appropriation of the realm, but rather a submission through tribute in exchange for political and commercial support. All the king asked

<sup>15</sup> See esp. the detailed analysis in Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires*, 45–93.

<sup>16</sup> The concepts are explored in great detail in António Vasconcelos de Saldanha, *Iustum Imperium: Dos tratados como fundamento do império dos portugueses no Oriente. Estudo de história do direito internacional e do direito português* (Lisbon/Macao, 1997).

for in exchange at this stage was a pair of Portuguese hunting dogs, to be sent to him as a sign confirming the *Estado's* acceptance of his submission.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, we know from a letter written in the following year what happened next. In 1547, a Portuguese adventurer dispatched from Goa to Kandy, António Moniz Barreto, marched through the same remote area as friar Simão.<sup>18</sup> When Barreto ran into the said king of Batticaloa, again, he was received with a proposal of vassalage. The local king offered, once more, to become a vassal, and even expressed the wish to host a Portuguese trading post, a *feitoria* like the one that had functioned at Colombo since the 1520s and the one that Kandy had wished to see established in the port of Trincomalee since around 1543. Barreto, like friar Simão, ignored the offer. To our eyes, Batticaloa sinks back into darkness. Eventually, the Portuguese did build a fort there in 1628, and soon afterwards the town became one of the first Dutch conquests in the region, precluding the disintegration of Portuguese rule in south India and Sri Lanka in the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup>

But let us stay in the sixteenth century and, rather than pursuing the story diachronically, reach out across the globe to identify comparable examples of suzerainty-based interactions. It is somewhat surprising that this theme has not been more widely explored by historians of early global interactions. To the layered, galactic polity of Lanka, we can add a whole range of other cases, not just in India's coastal lowlands lying between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, where the Portuguese had started their Asian diplomatic adventures in 1498, but also on the Swahili Coast, in parts of mainland and insular south-east Asia, in southern and western Africa, and possibly even in Brazil. There is a distinct plausibility to arguing that Portuguese imperialism in Asia, Africa, and possibly America worked politically and economically precisely on grounds of its ability to engage with such dispersed, but structurally analogous, hierarchical systems, and attach them to its own body politic through tributary diplomacy — which, of course, involved the tactical deployment of military power, but left local power structures largely intact. It was on grounds of such relations that the Portuguese monarchs projected symbolic authority as 'kings of kings' across the oceans, while rulers across the

<sup>17</sup> Simão de Coimbra to John III, in Schurhammer and Voretzsch, *Ceylon zur Zeit des Königs Bhuvaneka Bahu und Franz Xavers*, 431–3.

<sup>18</sup> António Moniz Barreto to João de Castro, Kayalpatnam, 22 April 1547, in Schurhammer and Voretzsch, *Ceylon zur Zeit des Königs Bhuvaneka Bahu und Franz Xavers*, 459–62.

<sup>19</sup> See Chandra Richard De Silva, *The Portuguese in Ceylon 1617–1638* (Colombo, 1972); and George D. Winius, *The Fatal History of Portuguese Ceylon: Transition to Dutch Rule* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

continents contributed actively to the making of a global network of allegiances.<sup>20</sup>

Examples abound. Embattled local lords in a variety of regions chose to recognize the overlordship of the Portuguese monarchs from the very beginning of the sixteenth century, either to stabilize their own position in complex local power hierarchies, or to challenge the local or regional status quo. In south India, the king of Cochin co-opted the Portuguese as early as 1500 to prop him up against his overlord in Calicut. In earlier years, the Cochin ruler had been subject to the greater king of Calicut, who upheld the right to depose his vassal at any moment. Once the Portuguese emerged as a potential counterbalance to Calicut, it made sense for the ruling elite in Cochin to seek a new alliance and harness the military power of the newcomers for their own purposes, even if it came at the cost of recognizing the king of Portugal as overlord.<sup>21</sup> Similar considerations drove the sultans of Malindi in east Africa, who saw the Portuguese as welcome allies against their competitors in Mombasa as well as against the declining hegemony of the area, the sultans of Kilwa.<sup>22</sup>

Other, comparable developments occurred further east. In the Moluccas, the sultans of Ternate drew tribute during the early sixteenth century from smaller lordships in the neighbouring island of Amboina, namely at Hitu and Hiemao.<sup>23</sup> After the Portuguese arrived in 1512, Sultan Bayan Sirullah of Ternate sought an alliance with them for at least three reasons: to strengthen his position as an overlord to Hitu and Hiemao, to avoid any of these lesser lords becoming friendly with the Portuguese themselves, and to gain an ally in his competition for supremacy in the islands against the rival sultan of Tidore. In the fifteenth century, similar power games had unfolded involving an alliance between Ternate and the Chinese, challenged by the sultan of

<sup>20</sup> The best attempt at pulling some of these cases together is Manuel Lobato, 'Reis vassallos, reis conversos e homens de poder: Formas de construção de uma identidade nobiliárquica no império português nos séculos XV a XIX', in Miguel Jasmins Rodrigues, Maria João Soares and Maria Bastião (eds.), *Pequena Nobreza nos Impérios Ibéricos de Antigo Regime* (Lisbon, 2011). Also see the overview in Francisco Bethencourt, 'Political Configurations and Local Powers', in Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (eds.), *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> On the early phase of Portuguese involvement with Cochin, see Jean Aubin, 'L'apprentissage de l'Inde: Cochin, 1503–1504', *Moyen-Orient et Océan Indien, XVI<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, iv (1987), 1–96.

<sup>22</sup> Disney, *History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, ii, 123.

<sup>23</sup> On this and other developments in the Moluccas, see Manuel Lobato, *Épices, conflit et religion: les Moluques et les Portugais dans la seconde moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, offprint (Lisbon, 2002).



Tidore who embraced Islam. Once Ternate gained an edge again in the 1510s on grounds of its Portuguese connection, the sultans of Tidore were quick to react: they sought an alliance with the Spanish, when the latter arrived in the archipelago in the 1520s. Over the following decades, the local conflict of two neighbouring island sultans became intertwined with the global rivalry of two Iberian monarchs. Two local overlords made use of the power structures linking Lisbon and Madrid with the Moluccas through the Indic and the Pacific to fight their own, local, wars. And two suzerain imperial overlords with global reach competed in the Moluccas through two local lords. The 1529 Treaty of Zaragoza helped smooth the waters, but doubts about where exactly ran the anti-meridian extending the line of Tordesillas, agreed in the Atlantic in 1494, remained for decades to come.<sup>24</sup>

It seems important to flag up this interdependence between local and global struggles to historians on the ground, who often read alliances with foreign powers such as the Chinese, the emerging Muslim polities of south-east Asia, the Portuguese and the Spanish as some sort of betrayal or alienation from local matters. Clearly, the two spheres were interconnected well before 1500. On the other hand, the conflict between Spain and Portugal over the possession of the Moluccas, a key moment in the making of the new global imagination drawing the three great oceans together into a single political theatre, only makes full sense if seen as part of local struggles for pre-eminence in the archipelago. In fact, the two island polities competing for overlordship in the archipelago may have *preferred* to have two globally active powers in the area as part of a system of checks and balances, rather than a single, triumphant one. When the rivalry later spilled over into neighbouring islands, this was not simply down to a crumbling of local polities under global pressure, but quite the opposite: a widening circle of local lords joined in with the dynamics under way. The 'king of the Papuas and emperor of Bengay', himself an overlord in need of consolidation of his position in what is today West Papua, thus sent envoys to the Moluccas to choose whether he might build an alliance by embracing Christianity, or rather Islam.<sup>25</sup> Eventually, the Portuguese were ejected from Ternate altogether, victims, again, of the rivalries they had for some time been able to thrive on.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See Luís Adão da Fonseca, *O Tratado de Tordesilhas e a diplomacia luso-castelhana no século XV* (Lisbon, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Lobato, *Épices, conflit et religion*, 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. Also see, by the same author, Manuel Lobato, 'The Moluccan Archipelago and Eastern Indonesia in the Second Half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in the Light of Portuguese and Spanish Accounts', in Francis Dutra and João Camilo dos Santos (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on the Portuguese and the Pacific* (Santa Barbara, 1995).

There are fascinating parallels here with developments elsewhere, involving Spanish and Dutch newcomers in the Philippines, in Java and in Taiwan.<sup>27</sup> Further west, the Portuguese engagement in the Persian Gulf, or indeed their diplomatic and political interactions in certain areas of west Africa, spring to mind.<sup>28</sup> This is not the place to draw a comprehensive map of such connections, only to signal the pertinence of studying them comparatively much more systematically than has been done so far. In many of these places, the thin varnish of Portuguese (or Spanish, or later Dutch, English, French and even Danish) expansionism barely covers the complex local power struggles that allowed for a European involvement in the first place. Even in Brazil, the early diplomatic agency of power figures supporting the growth of Portuguese dominion deserves attention, before the flow of tribute was inverted and local *caciques* began to receive royal grants in return for their loyalty as the Portuguese empire consolidated its grip.<sup>29</sup>

As one goes through these cases, three fascinating possibilities emerge that deserve to be tested through more systematic studies. Firstly, the structural similarities of political systems built around the principle of layered or nesting suzerainty allowed for almost effortless connections between polities operating at different scales. Secondly, paying tribute to a lord operating globally may indeed have carried perceived advantages over paying it to a power with its symbolic centre closer by — meaning that distance is not just not an obstacle, but at times an outright catalyst for new diplomatic

<sup>27</sup> See Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 2008); Romain Bertrand, *L'histoire à parts égales: Récits d'une rencontre, Orient–Occident (XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris, 2011); and Romain Bertrand, *Le long remords de la conquête. Manille–Mexico–Madrid: l'affaire Diego de Ávila (1577–1580)* (Paris, 2015); Kwee Hui Kian, *The Political Economy of Java's Northeast Coast, c.1740–1800: Elite Synergy* (Leiden, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> See Jean Aubin, 'Le royaume d'Ormuz au début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Mare-Luso Indicum*, ii (1973); Dejanirah Couto, 'Réactions anti-portugaises dans le golfe Persique', in Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz (ed.), *Aquém e além da Taprobana: Estudos Luso-Orientais à memória de Jean Aubin e Denys Lombard* (Lisbon, 2002); Ivana Elbl, 'Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy: Portuguese Relations with West Africa, 1441–1521', *Journal of World History*, iii, 2 (1992); Herman Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> See Marcello Felipe Duarte, 'De Arariboia a Martim Afonso: a metamorfose indígena pela guerra nas águas da Guanabara', in *Navigator. Subsídios para a História Marítima do Brasil*, vii, 14 (2011); and Maria Regina Celestino de Almeida, *Metamorfozes Indígenas — identidade e cultura nas aldeias coloniais do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 2003). A comparable inversion of the cash flow occurred around the king of Kotte in Sri Lanka sometime between 1574 and 1581: Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires*, 158.

connections. And thirdly, the notion of ‘global’ reach itself was not necessarily connoted in these local contexts as carrying a game-changing significance in terms of a shifting power balance between Iberia and other regions.

It is very tempting to see such occurrences as part of a remarkably coherent and functional panorama of interactions occurring across the continents, which was of course traversed by violence, but did not in itself prepare the ground for the rise of the West over the rest. The pair of hunting dogs requested in 1546 by the king of Batticaloa offers a particularly evocative image in this regard. As an act of cross-cultural symbolic communication, it suits interpretations that emphasize the connectability of courtly elite cultures in the global sixteenth century, regardless of scale.<sup>30</sup> Hunting dogs appear in many representations of royal figures across Europe and Asia, suggesting a potential for implicit — or indeed complicit — understandings among Eurasian elites, which then helps explain the remarkably smooth attachment of polities such as Kotte, Malindi or Cochin to the nascent, globally operating empire of the Portuguese.<sup>31</sup> The image of the hunting dogs — a detail as extraordinary in the way it sets up an unheard of destination for two animals, as it is banal in the way it renders the normality of humans desiring gifts — evokes a world of diplomatic gestures and objects transcending linguistic and religious boundaries, sitting well with scholarly explorations of court culture as a connecting platform for early modern interactions across the continents.<sup>32</sup> We thus seem to observe a global concatenation of communicational acts between broadly like-minded elites that, almost regardless of where exactly they sat on the map, could talk to each other with reference to shared values of nobility, honour, military might and cultural refinement. Any microhistorical exploration of a particular encounter, diplomatic gesture or desire can, under such circumstances, link up almost seamlessly what was going on in specific places with the transcontinental novelties of the time. As the mid sixteenth-century Portuguese court chronicler João de Barros put it,

<sup>30</sup> See Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, ‘Rituals of Decision Making? Early Modern European Assemblies of Estates as Acts of Symbolic Communication’, in Yoshihisa Hattori (ed.), *Political Order and the Forms of Communication in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Rome, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> On dogs and hunting, see Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (Philadelphia, 2006). On horses and hunting in late medieval Portugal, see *Livro da Montaria de Dom João I, Rei de Portugal*, ed. João Maria Esteves Pereira (Lisbon, 1918).

<sup>32</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012); Zoltán Biedermann, Giorgio Riello and Anne Gerritsen (eds.), *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia* (New York, 2018).

‘all nations have their words to signal nobility and honour’.<sup>33</sup> The dogs — a pair of which might even be made to reproduce locally after travelling from afar, would express the local *and* global power of commensurable values to perfection. As a detail both extraordinary and normal, they seem to tell us a fascinating story about Batticaloa, about Lisbon, and about the processes that were in 1546 linking up the two royal courts across a novel, but effortlessly emerging, space of transcontinental trade and diplomacy. In other words, the dogs are a detail that seems to sit everywhere — in the local, in the emerging global — with equivalent suggestive powers.

Many early modernists today are likely to seek out commonalities, resonances and signs of translatability, and will feel inclined to take them as an indication that the local can be bound up with the global rather neatly: the two being capable of resonating with, and reinforcing, each other. In this spirit, it would be tempting to state that there is no fundamental difference in nature between elites operating with a relatively limited local or regional reach — say, within an area that could be covered by foot or on ship within a few days —, and others capable of imposing tribute in distant continents. A micro-historical approach to local encounters might thus — or so it seems — allow for an almost flawless perspective on the making of global connections. We could rest here, assuming that microhistories of the global are not much of a challenge at all.

## II

### PLUS ULTRA: THE LOCAL POLITICS OF LONG-DISTANCE CONNECTIONS

The argument drafted so far has been deliberately lofty. It may seduce on grounds of its symmetries and global resonances. Because it is also considerably lacking in detail, however, it will rightly elicit calls for a more sustained enquiry into the local mechanics of long-distance connectivity. Layered suzerainties and their transcontinental connectability may be a thing of great beauty for global historians to seize upon — a *Global History of Layered Suzerainties* would certainly be a worthy project<sup>34</sup> —, but we also need to understand what exactly was motivating rulers in each particular place to establish far-flung connections. This does not necessarily invalidate what has been said so far, but it does suggest that we ought to take a close look

<sup>33</sup> *Ásia de Joao de Barros*, ed. António Baião and Luís F. Lindley Sintra, reprint, 4 vols. (Lisbon, 1988–2001), i, 103 (decade i, book iii, chap. ix).

<sup>34</sup> Some elements of this history can be found in Peter Fibiger Bang and C. A. Bayly (eds.), *Tributary Empires in Global History* (New York, 2011); and Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (eds.), *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge, 2012).

at the specific contexts in which global connections grew out of local power centres, each traversed by their own, local, political struggles.<sup>35</sup> Diplomacy, crucially, served as a means of power-building on both the global and the local fronts, and we are now under an obligation to delve more deeply into the power struggles animating it at the latter level — not to produce local history, but to expose the strong local roots of transcontinental diplomatic initiatives.

In Batticaloa, in 1546, it was not primarily an abstract vision of globally interlinking, layered suzerainties that drove the local king to offer his vassalage to the distant king of Portugal. The king's move was most palpably grounded in a concrete problem of that precise moment, deriving from intra-court competition. Whilst the king of Batticaloa wished to impose his 12-year-old son to succeed him on the local throne, his rivals on the ground opposed the plan. Logically, the king turned to external forces to help him consolidate his position within the local power sphere. Strikingly though, he seems to have felt that requesting support from the king of Kandy, his traditional overlord, would not be enough. Being aware of the Portuguese participation in south Asian political matters, the king's move may have responded to an intuition that — as we just saw in the Moluccan case — having two competing overlords active in the area was preferable to being subject to just one. Quite possibly as well, judging from other Lankan data for the same period, some of the king of Batticaloa's internal opponents may have maintained their own ties at the Kandyan court. Or Batticaloa's tributary king at Yala may have stirred up opposition to lessen his burden — we simply do not know. Internal and external affairs were deeply intertwined in a world where the modern concept of sovereignty was only just emerging, and to affirm oneself as king would involve a constant struggle against disruptive forces that muddied the waters, both inside and outside the realm. In fact, the very notion of a bounded realm with a clear border was almost entirely absent from Lanka during this period, and largely embryonic elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

It seems useful at this point to add that there were certain gradations to the supra-local, and a rationale to going further afield in certain moments — *plus*

<sup>35</sup> See Riccardo Fubini, *Italia quattrocentesca: Politica e diplomazia al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico* (Milan, 1994); and Daniela Frigo (ed.), *Principi, Ambasciatori e 'Jus Gentium': L'amministrazione della Politica Estera nel Piemonte del Settecento* (Rome, 1991), trans. as *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> All this is explored for a variety of contexts within Sri Lanka in Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires*.

*ultra*, as the motto of the distant emperor Charles V would have it.<sup>37</sup> In contrast with the island itself, south India and south-east Asia offered realms less densely traversed by Lankan family relations than the average Lankan court.<sup>38</sup> In India, the Portuguese with their freshly established strongholds offered the prospect of opening a new chapter altogether. In places such as Goa and Cochin, the king of Batticaloa would not be encumbered by his own subjects and their allies. The seductive quality of this new diplomatic sphere extending a little further afield than earlier relations resulted directly from the novelty of the connection. Had the diplomatic offensive of the local king been allowed to unfold, the situation would probably soon have been complicated. Internal foes would have reached out from Batticaloa to the Portuguese, too, as happened with Kotte's and other Lankan kingdoms' diplomacy-savvy elites. Goa and Cochin would have become stages where envoys of rival local factions came to compete with each other diplomatically, thus undermining the exclusivity of the king's relationship with the Portuguese.<sup>39</sup>

The push for diplomatic relations with increasingly distant partners or overlords can be observed in many places. In the Moluccas, south India, east and west Africa, and perhaps even Brazil, the openness to paying tribute to the Portuguese was almost invariably grounded in a combination of internal, courtly, rivalries and geographically limited political dynamics, calling for microhistories that focus on the local, whilst seeking out how small spaces generate — or nurture a longing for — wider connections. In each of these cases, the external sphere came to function as either a stage for an overcoming of local differences, or one to perpetuate them, or a tense combination of both. This is not the place to explore any of those cases in detail, though the potential benefits of doing so in a comparative and connective perspective are clearly considerable. Whether we are looking at a Gujarati sultan reaching out to the Portuguese as he struggled to contain Mughal expansion, a Wolof prince travelling to Lisbon to negotiate support for his bid to take power in Senegambia, or a south Arabian ruler reacting to his neighbour's alliance with the Ottomans by entering a partnership with Goa, it is always worth looking into the details of such deals emerging from local conflicts.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See Earl Rosenthal, 'Plus Ultra, Non plus Ultra, and the Columnar Device of Emperor Charles V', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xxxiv (1971), 204–228.

<sup>38</sup> On relations with south-east Asia, see Tilman Frasch, 'A Pāli cosmopolis? Sri Lanka and the Theravāda Buddhist Ecumene, c.500–1500', in Biedermann and Strathern (eds.), *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History*, 66–76.

<sup>39</sup> See Biedermann, 'Cosmopolitan Converts'.

<sup>40</sup> On Bahadur Shah and his relations with the Ottomans and the Portuguese, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam, 'Letters from a Sinking Sultan', in Sanjay

But what about the Portuguese monarchy itself? Was it, on grounds of the way the world suddenly opened up to it in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, drawn into playing the role of global diplomatic agent on grounds of some sort of grand inevitability? Over the next pages, I argue that here, too, the rationale of reaching out to diplomatic partners further and further afield is to be sought in concrete preoccupations emerging from local struggles for authority and power. As the Lusitanian monarchs reached out to impose tribute on a variety of 'lesser' kings and, at the same time, developed and transformed their diplomatic relations with other rulers across Europe and their own overlords in Rome, they did something profoundly commensurate to countless other rulers across the continents, including the king of Batticaloa.

For reasons difficult to understand, the connection between internal power struggles and the making of a larger diplomatic theatre has not been made very emphatically among historians of Portugal. Historiographically speaking, the field is ripe for such a connection. On the one hand, there *has* been some growth in the literature concerned with Portugal's diplomatic exploits during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries — albeit often, as we shall see, from a somewhat anachronistic perspective that fails to take internal courtly struggles into account.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, there already is an abundant literature on the struggles between kings and other elite agents in Portugal for this period. On this matter, historians have oscillated between the identification of a precocious tendency towards absolutist regal

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Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam (eds.), *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York, 2011). On the Wolof prince Bemoim, see Avelino Teixeira da Mota, *D. João Bemoin e a expedição Portuguesa ao Senegal em 1489* (Lisbon, 1971). On the rivalry between Kishn and Shih, see Zoltán Biedermann, 'An Island under the Influence: Soqotra at the Crossroads of Egypt, Persia and India from Antiquity to the Early Modern Age', in Ralph Kauz (ed.), *Aspects of the Maritime Silk Road: From the Persian Gulf to the East China Sea* (Wiesbaden, 2010), 9–24.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, the collection of essays in Manuela Mendonça, *As relações externas de Portugal nos finais da Idade Média* (Lisbon, 1994); and Justino Mendes de Almeida, 'A Diplomacia Portuguesa no Período Áureo dos Descobrimentos: As Orações Obediençiais (*De Oboedientia*) ao Papa', in *A Diplomacia na História de Portugal, Actas do Colóquio* (Lisbon, 1990). A promising recent title is Diogo Faria, 'A diplomacia de D. Manuel I segundo um manuscrito da Biblioteca Britânica', *Fragmenta Historica*, iv (2016), 111–39. The classic overview studies are Jorge Borges de Macedo, *História diplomática de Portugal: constantes e linhas de força* (Lisbon, 1987); and Saldanha, *Iustum Imperium*. An excellent study opening up the field to non-European dynamics is Elbl, 'Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy'.

affirmation from the late fifteenth century and a more critical stance emphasizing the fragility of monarchical rule in a fragmented realm well into the seventeenth century.<sup>42</sup> What is beyond discussion is that an intense struggle took place, revolving not only around power relations between courtly equals, but around the possibility of the king ruling supreme — an anticipation, still steeped in the ideological and material conditions of medieval Iberia, of the absolutist impulses of later times. The reigns of John II (1481–95) and Manuel I (1495–1521) were particularly intense in this regard.<sup>43</sup>

To explain the relative strengthening of royal authority in Portugal from the 1480s onwards, historians have highlighted legal, jurisdictional, fiscal, municipal, aesthetic, literary, cartographic and military reforms.<sup>44</sup> Maritime expansion has naturally been a central aspect of the panorama.<sup>45</sup> What has tended to be neglected is the way all this was supported by the staging of royal authority through diplomacy. Again, the idea of consolidating royal authority through expansive gestures *plus ultra*, be it conquest or the imposition of suzerainty beyond the limits of the kingdom, was not new.

<sup>42</sup> The successes of John II in particular are explored in Manuela Mendonça, *D. João II. Um percurso humano e político nas origens da modernidade em Portugal* (Lisbon, 1991), whilst a slightly less straightforward narrative can be found in Luís Adão da Fonseca, *D. João II* (Lisbon, 2007). A more sceptical view is extolled, for a later period but with evident implications for the transition into the sixteenth century, in António Manuel Hespanha, *As vésperas do Leviathan: Instituições e poder político, Portugal — séc. XVII* (Coimbra, 1994). Also see, as an attempt to argue in a similar vein for the empire, António Manuel and Catarina Madeira Santos, 'Os Poderes num Império Oceânico', in José Mattoso (ed.), *História de Portugal* (Lisbon, 1993–4), vol. 4, 395–413.

<sup>43</sup> On John II, see Mendonça, *D. João II*. On Manuel I, the most recent synthesis is João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, *D. Manuel I* (Lisbon, 2007), to be read in parallel with Jean Aubin, *Études inédites sur le règne de D. Manuel, 1495–1521*, being vol. III of *Le Latin et l'Astrolabe: recherches sur le Portugal de la Renaissance, son expansion en Asie et les relations internationales* (Paris, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> The best synthesis of this period remains vol. 3 of the *História de Portugal* edited by José Mattoso (Lisbon, 1993). Also see Magarida Garcez Ventura, 'Poder político no Portugal quatrocentista: uma leitura alargada em passado anacrónico', *Brathair*, xvi, 2 (2016). On the conceptualization of regal power in medieval and early modern Portugal, the classic is Martim de Albuquerque, *O poder político no Renascimento português* (Lisbon, 1968).

<sup>45</sup> This is extolled in virtually every study dedicated to Manuel I in a somewhat predictable manner. An original and interesting take on the matter, revolving around the notion that Manuel I managed to co-opt potentially hostile nobles into expansionist deeds, can be found in Susannah Humble Ferreira, 'Prestige, Ideology and Social Politics: The Place of the Portuguese Overseas Expansion in the Policies of Dom Manuel (1495–1521)', *Itinerario*, xxiv, 1 (2000).



Claims to *imperium* in areas outside the core of a realm often served, in medieval Europe, to signal a consolidation of sovereignty in its incipient sense.<sup>46</sup> Hence the inclusion in the title of the kings of Portugal — freshly elevated to royal condition in the 1140s as a sign of independence from their Castilian overlords — of a reference to the ‘kingdom of the Algarve’, added after a short-lived first conquest of the *taifa* capital Silves in 1189 (the definitive conquest of the Algarve was finished in 1249). Being ‘king of the Algarve’ in addition to ‘king of Portugal’, instead of simply making the Algarve into a portion of Portugal, sent a strong signal to the traditional Iberian overlords at Toledo that the Portuguese leader meant to be recognized as a sovereign ruler at the level of others across Christianity — kings capable of their own conquests, and thus also worthy of offering their own homage to Rome.<sup>47</sup> From the twelfth–thirteenth centuries onwards, the kings of Aragon, Castile and Portugal all laboured to be recognized by other Catholic rulers and, above all, the papacy, as defenders of the faith in the wider Mediterranean (and soon Atlantic) theatres of war. Crusading remained a mission of great symbolic importance throughout the early modern period well into the seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries, when Portugal eventually abandoned its last positions in Morocco.<sup>48</sup>

Crucially, though, expansion supported the consolidation of royal authority not only through the making of war, but also through the furthering of the mandate to make peace. On this front, the kings of medieval Iberia had the singular advantage of facing Islamic forces that were overall on the retreat. Portuguese rulers exchanged ambassadors and gifts with Muslim rulers from early on, negotiating matters of policy and trade, and celebrating lasting treaties in a process that may have involved substantial cultural impulses through diplomacy from the Islamic world into the Latin West. The kings of Portugal interacted diplomatically with the Nasrid rulers of Granada from the 1360s, and then oversaw an intensification of diplomatic activities as Lusitanian troops pushed into north Africa from 1415 onwards. Crucially, this dynamic intensified noticeably in the late fifteenth century. With the kingdom of Fez alone, treaties were signed in 1471, 1490, 1538 and 1545. Others, such as Azemmour (1510) and Beles (1548), followed. To such

<sup>46</sup> David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), 30.

<sup>47</sup> A good overview is in Disney, *History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, i, 65–84. Regarding the Vatican’s position, see Paolo Prodi, *The Papal Prince: One Body and Two Souls. The Papal Monarchy in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1982).

<sup>48</sup> Disney speaks of ‘neo-reconquest’ and of ‘late resurgent expansionism’ for the sixteenth century: *History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, ii, 5–26 and 165–8.

activities carried out in north Africa, the expansion into western and southern Africa after 1450 started to add yet another field of military and diplomatic engagement on an increasingly ample geographical scale. The breakthrough then occurred from the 1480s–90s, with the unfolding of intense diplomatic activity in the Congo, the sultanates of the Swahili Coast, parts of Arabia, Persia, south and south-east Asia, and eventually the Far East.<sup>49</sup>

Here was something that the kings of Portugal were able to exploit for internal political purposes like no one else in the realm: making war *and* peace became increasingly an exclusive royal prerogative, entailing a growing body of activities centred around the figure of the king. This is an important point because, whilst diplomacy is generally mentioned by historians of Portugal interested in the consolidation of royal authority during the period from the 1470s to the 1550s, there is a distinct tendency to present the matter as being one of ‘external policy’ in a somewhat anachronistic sense anticipating post-1648 international relations.<sup>50</sup> This clearly misses some of the most important forces at play. To the late medieval title of ‘King of Portugal and of the Algarve’, a reference was first added in 1471, after the conquest of Asilah and Tangiers in Morocco, to ‘another Algarve’ extending ‘beyond the Sea in Africa’. In combination with the mythology attached to continents up to this day, the addition exerted and continues to exert great symbolic power.<sup>51</sup> And yet, what was at stake in 1471 and again in 1485, when John II included a reference to the lordship (*senhorio*) of ‘Guinea’ in his title, was not primarily the push of a European nation into the wider world, nor even the staking of claims against other European rulers.<sup>52</sup> It was the authority of the Portuguese monarch over his own subjects as new frontiers opened up to them in the Atlantic. The key event in this regard was the establishment, in January 1482, of a crown-controlled fort at Mina, on the Guinea Coast, intended by John II to impose royal authority over the private trade that might otherwise have flourished there.

The inclusion of a reference to the lordship of Guinea in the royal title marked the completion of an aggressive campaign against a series of leading figures of the aristocracy, namely the third duke of Braganza, Dom Fernando,

<sup>49</sup> All these interactions are analysed in detail in Saldanha, *Iustum Imperium*.

<sup>50</sup> See Pedro Cardim, ‘A prática diplomática na Europa do Antigo Regime’, in Luís Nuno Rodrigues and Fernando Martins (eds.), *História e relações internacionais: Temas e debates* (Évora, 2016), 11–53.

<sup>51</sup> Kären Wigen and Martin W. Lewis, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997).

<sup>52</sup> See Fonseca, *D. João II*, 86; Costa, *D. Manuel I*, 223.

who was a staunch opponent of centralizing measures, including crown-controlled customs and trade. The duke went to the point of suggesting, in his own secret negotiations with the Spanish monarchs, that the waters of west Africa might be opened up to merchants based in the ports of Andalusia.<sup>53</sup> Under the surface of the international question thus ran a much more palpable and urgent challenge to the authority of the king: the challenge of internal dissent, with a very concrete risk of private traders limiting the pecuniary assets of the crown. By 1483, Duke Fernando was dead, his execution ordered by the king on grounds of an accusation of conspiracy, and his remaining family sent into exile.

From that moment, John II could pursue his policy of regal protagonism in the Mina region with much greater liberty than before. At this point, it is worth turning our head slightly and gesturing towards another parallel not explored so far between the courtly conflicts at Lisbon and in places such as Batticaloa. The Portuguese monarchs, too, had an overlord, to whom they bowed in homage as Batticaloa traditionally bowed to Kandy, and Kandy to Kotte: Rome. There is, to be sure, an obvious and very profound difference at one level: the Portuguese crown in Africa and Asia offered (or promised to offer) military support and resources to rulers paying tribute. The Vatican never did anything directly comparable. But at another level, there is a significant parallel: the symbolic support of the Vatican was invaluable, and the royal monopoly over diplomacy with the popes was again an expression of authority and a means to further it against internal rivals. John II is a fascinating figure in this regard. From the 1480s, precisely as the power struggles around Mina and against the Braganzas unfolded, one also notices an increase in formalized diplomatic interactions between the Portuguese crown and the Vatican. The early years of the reign, 1481–4, saw a flurry of activities, dominated rather remarkably by papal attacks against the freshly acclaimed John II. A whole series of briefs and bulls either threatened the monarch in rather harsh terms, or openly incited his rivals to resist him. Crucially, several of these documents reveal how royal authority was undermined at that point through alternative diplomatic channels, as key rivals of the monarch maintained their own semi-formal links with Rome — very much in the way competing Lankan factions pulled strings in Goa, Tanjore and other places. Two of these figures in Portugal were Dom Fernando, the duke of Braganza already mentioned, and Dom Jorge, duke of Viseu, another aristocrat of royal lineage and high ambitions (indeed a first cousin and brother-in-law of the

<sup>53</sup> Fonseca, *D. João II*, 88.

king).<sup>54</sup> By 1484, the latter was as dead as the former, stabbed by John II in person following the discovery of a second regicidal conspiracy.<sup>55</sup>

Once the events in Portugal reached their climax and the king emerged victorious, there was a remarkable climbdown in the rhetoric of the papacy, suggesting again a close connection between internal power struggles and external diplomacy. The fiction of papal overlordship was maintained, of course, and would continue to be cultivated by both parties for centuries to come. But the tone changed. Bulls issued in February 1486 suggest a successful diplomatic manoeuvre on the part of the envoys of John II in Rome to drag the dialogue to exactly where the king wished it to unfold: around the theme of overseas expansion in Africa, involving the fight against Islam and the search for Christian allies.<sup>56</sup> Suddenly, the king's project of controlling the Guinea trade through Mina could be styled as a means of expanding the Christian faith, thus legitimizing the policies of *mare clausum* and commercial centralization, and completing the political circle connecting internal struggles and external diplomacy.<sup>57</sup> In the way John II did everything to keep up the image of a privileged relationship with the papacy whilst simultaneously doing all he could to keep papal authority in check and making sure it did not link up with other powerful figures inside his realm, one senses a strong similarity with the dynamism of tributary relations in places such as Sri Lanka: it was very much part of the game that suzerainty should be almost permanently subject to renegotiation, and that in this struggle the control over local opponents was key.

Naturally, as one would expect from a late fifteenth-century context, John II never ruled without opposition, and in his later years in particular he faced much resistance from a faction headed by his own wife, queen Leonor.<sup>58</sup> But among the many papal bulls and missives arriving during the remaining nine years of his reign, not a single one attacked the king for his ongoing

<sup>54</sup> Manuel Francisco de Barros e Sousa Santarém and Luiz Augusto Rebello da Silva, *Quadro elementar das relações políticas e diplomáticas de Portugal com as diversas potencias do mundo*, 18 vols. (Paris, 1842–59), x, 95–102.

<sup>55</sup> Joaquim Romero de Magalhães, 'Os régios protagonistas do poder', in José Mattoso (ed.), *História de Portugal* (Lisbon, 1993–4), vol. iv, 516–17.

<sup>56</sup> Santarém and Silva, *Quadro elementar das relações políticas e diplomáticas de Portugal*, x, 102–3.

<sup>57</sup> Santarém and Silva, *Quadro elementar das relações políticas e diplomáticas de Portugal*, x, 103–5. Also see *Ásia de Joao de Barros*, ed. Baiao and Sintra i, 71 (decade i, book iii, chap. iii).

<sup>58</sup> Mendonça, *D. João II*, 454–66.

centralizing efforts in the kingdom.<sup>59</sup> Holy warfare also became the theme of the first major bull of the reign of Manuel I (1495–1521),<sup>60</sup> and over the following years, papal bulls and briefs confirming the royal control (*padroado*) over the expanding church structures in Africa and Asia, and lauding Manuel for his commitment to the fight against Islam, show a picture of mutual accommodation. In the meantime, on the home front, Manuel I continued the project developed by John II from the mid 1480s of seeking out a maritime passage to India. This was, again, done against the opposition of a number of elite families and members of the court and royal council. In fact, the appointment of Vasco da Gama — a man with ties to the Braganza network — to command the 1497 fleet to Calicut can be read precisely as a gesture to accommodate a court faction less interested in crusade and crown-controlled expansion than in free trade.<sup>61</sup> As the India fleet led by Vasco da Gama returned to Lisbon in 1499, the moment could very well have been seized by the king's rivals who did not wish to see an expansion of royal powers into the Indian Ocean. The expedition was — like that of Columbus in 1492–3 — of limited material success, and diplomatically Gama had failed to create a bond with the king of Calicut.<sup>62</sup> In fact, Gama was visited, upon his arrival at Belém near the mouth of the Tagus, by 'all the *senhores* of the court', including those who wished to discourage Manuel from investing further in official expansion in the East. This could well have been the death of the royal project to conduct diplomacy and, on such grounds, monopolistic trade, in the Orient.<sup>63</sup>

That same day, however, the king staged a magnificent reception for Gama, who was paraded in great solemnity to the city and into the royal palace, a space reminding everyone of how Gama had been made to kneel in front of the monarch *before* his departure, when invested to serve as an 'ambassador'.<sup>64</sup> According to the official chronicles, it was precisely in this context, at the end of August 1499, that Manuel I extended the Portuguese royal title to

<sup>59</sup> Santarém and Silva, *Quadro elementar das relações políticas e diplomáticas de Portugal*, x, 105–12.

<sup>60</sup> Santarém and Silva, *Quadro elementar das relações políticas e diplomáticas de Portugal*, x, 116–17. Remarkably, on the same day, another bull entitled Manuel I to trade with the Islamic world. Weapons, iron, and other forbidden goods were excluded in principle, but could be traded to Guinea as long as no harm ensued to Christians: *ibid.*, x, 117.

<sup>61</sup> Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz, 'Factions, Interests and Messianism: The Politics of Portuguese Expansion in the East, 1500–1521', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, xxviii, 1 (1991); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>62</sup> See Subrahmanyam, *Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, for a revision of older triumphalist interpretations of Gama's expedition.

<sup>63</sup> *Ásia de Joao de Barros*, ed. Baiao and Sintra, i, 164 (decade i, book iv, chap. xi).

<sup>64</sup> See Saldanha, *Iustum Imperium*, 341.

its quasi-definitive form: 'By the Grace of God, King of Portugal and of the Algarves on this side of the sea and the other, in Africa, Lord of Guinea and of the Conquest, Navigation, and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia, India, etc.'<sup>65</sup> There is, for the scholar with an appreciation of microhistorical methods, a multitude of worlds to be explored in these few lines. The emerging globe is there, of course, and we shall come back to it soon. But also, as I have been arguing in this section, the densely conflictive world of a geographically contained, Iberian elite that can be dissected for struggles between individuals, families and factions. The references to 'conquest', 'navigation' and 'commerce' are deeply steeped in the internal power struggles of Portuguese society. Such words served not just to project authority *outwards*, across the continents — they also sent powerful signals *inwards*, through Portugal, proclaiming the prerogatives of the monarch.<sup>66</sup>

Whilst not an inch of land had been taken possession of in the East, the symbolic charging of the 1497–9 expedition as a political and diplomatic enterprise was key to the making of the image of Manuel I as an imperial overlord *and* a firmly ruling, reformist monarch in Portugal. For this to occur, the royal status of the African and Asian interlocutors of the king's agents was key. In the chronicles dedicated to this period, it is in the narrative of the 1497–9 expedition that the first detailed descriptions of diplomatic receptions emerge in official scripture. We learn more about the diplomatic encounters in Mozambique, Mombasa, Malindi and Calicut than about any previous receptions staged in Lisbon. We hear about the coming, from Malindi, of the first Oriental ambassador to Europe via the Cape route.<sup>67</sup> We learn about how the king issued orders to the leader of the second India fleet, Pedro Álvares Cabral (1500) with an emphasis on diplomatic and military matters, including gifts for the sultan of Malindi.<sup>68</sup> Further chapters narrate diplomatic interactions in Kilwa and Malindi, with an emphasis on how both places recognized the greatness of Manuel. A passage mentions how the gifts sent from Lisbon were put on display in Malindi.<sup>69</sup> Another chapter

<sup>65</sup> *Pela Graça de Deus, Rei de Portugal e dos Algarves, d'Aquém e d'Além-Mar em África, Senhor da Guiné e da Conquista, Navegação e Comércio da Etiópia, Arábia, Pérsia e Índia, etc.* See Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz, 'L'idée impériale manuélienne', in Jean Aubin (ed.), *La découverte, le Portugal et l'Europe, Actes du Colloque* (Paris, 1990).

<sup>66</sup> Further details can be explored in *Ásia de João de Barros*, i, 164 (decade i, book iv, chapters 11–12) and 170 (decade i, book v, chapter i).

<sup>67</sup> Damião de Góis, *Chronica do Felicissimo Rei Dom Emanuel* (Lisbon, 1566), fos. 42–42<sup>v</sup> (chapter xlv).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 50<sup>v</sup> (chapter liiii).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 56<sup>v</sup>–57 [faulty pagination] (chapter lvii).

explores the commercial and diplomatic engagements in Cochin, Quilon and Cannanore, including the story of an ambassador sent from the latter kingdom to Lisbon.<sup>70</sup> In a passage dedicated to the fleet that left Portugal in 1502, the fourth one overall and the second commanded by Vasco da Gama, details are finally also given of gifts exchanged: Gama handed over a crown to the king of Cochin, and received in exchange a special pharmaceutical substance, probably a bezoar stone.<sup>71</sup> Suddenly, our sources develop a level of detail that begins to stand up to the exigencies of classic microhistory.

The picture is particularly interesting when one considers the flow of material goods from distant regions through the royal palace in Lisbon, and the way this could be styled as carrying political weight in connection with the royal title just created.<sup>72</sup> If monarchs could not always count on reigning supreme in terms of the quantity of exotic matter coming through their hands, they stood a much better chance with regard to quality, and especially symbolic value derived from diplomacy. The bezoar stone just mentioned may have been small (apparently, the size of a hazelnut), but it was special: it was the gift of a king, it could be displayed as such, and it could be commemorated as such in a chronicle like that of *Damião de Góis* decades later. Receiving a royal gift, a gift-bearing ambassador, or even a prince from overseas was an affair altogether different from having access to expensive goods available on the Asian market: it was an illustration of the unique prerogatives of kingship as it underwent a transformation in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Portugal. Fleets might carry hundreds of individuals representing various competing court factions all the way to India, and a number of individuals might receive gifts there from local rulers. But the very act of giving was by definition based on the principle that one king in Africa or Asia was engaging with the representatives of another, single and uncontested, king in Portugal.

The most paradigmatic case in this regard concerns the gold that the sultan of Kilwa was forced to hand over as tribute (*páreas*) to Vasco da Gama in 1502. The first annual payment — in the region of 4–6 kg of East African gold — was brought back to Lisbon and, there, taken along with the contract signed in Kilwa on a solemn procession through the city by the nobles present at court. The gold was then used in the making of a monstrance commissioned by Manuel I for his royal chapel, later bequeathed to the Hieronymites

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 59<sup>v</sup>–60<sup>v</sup> (chapter lx).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 67<sup>v</sup>–68 (chapter lxix).

<sup>72</sup> See Zoltán Biedermann, 'Diplomatic Ivories: Sri Lankan Caskets and the European-Asian Diplomatic Exchange, 1500–1600', in Biedermann, Gerritsen and Riello (eds.), *Global Gifts*.

of Belém.<sup>73</sup> This masterpiece of goldsmithery illustrates the notion of a sacred *axis mundi*, topped by the Holy Cross, God the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ. The latter — on display as a hoist — appears surrounded by the twelve apostles kneeling in adoration. As a king placing much emphasis on his Catholic faith, Manuel could have been seen to resemble one of these kneeling figures, though the fact that he himself was being accepted as an overlord in many parts of the world could also be understood to be reflected in the overall architecture of the monstrance. An inscription engraved in the pedestal proclaimed with great visibility that ‘the very high prince and powerful lord Dom Manuel I’ had the object ‘made from the gold of the tribute of Quiloa’.<sup>74</sup>

To be sure, the efficacy of diplomacy on the ground was often very limited, the vulnerability of the Portuguese crown’s agents in distant lands considerable, and to take such fragilities into account remains crucial for an understanding of how things evolved across Africa and Asia. Even in the field of high diplomacy, interference from competitors began to occur soon after the early years of exploration. The most spectacular moment of usurpation occurred when, in 1521, the official ambassador going from Goa to Bengal encountered a rival ambassador financed by private merchants on the ground.<sup>75</sup> However, in terms of how diplomacy could be styled at the Portuguese court and towards the European public to enhance the monarch’s standing, the possibilities were substantial. On this front, Manuel and his successors performed very effectively. The focus of the most symbolically laden diplomatic interactions was always the monarch himself, and for this to occur, the fact that some of the symbolically most powerful diplomacy happened in such distant places as Malindi and Cochin clearly helped. The monarchs achieved success in building up an ample, transcontinental sphere of suzerainty, anchored in local courts willing to engage with its claims to overlordship on grounds of comparable power struggles. In this sense, one observes again a remarkable interdependence between the emerging global and the local, though now with a much richer texture than in the rather abstract game of resonances explored in the first section of this article.

<sup>73</sup> Góis, *Chronica do Felicissimo Rei Dom Emanuel*, fos. 66<sup>v</sup>–67 (chapter lxxviii) and fo. 69 (chapter lxxvix).

<sup>74</sup> On the monstrance, see Leonor d’Orey and Luís Penalva (eds.), *A custódia de Belém: 500 anos* (Lisbon, 2010). Numerous images of the monstrance, widely known as ‘custódia de Belém’, can be found online.

<sup>75</sup> See Zoltán Biedermann, *The Portuguese in Sri Lanka and South India: Studies in the History of Empire, Diplomacy and Trade* (Wiesbaden, 2014), ch. 2, ‘A Negotiating Empire’.



If we go down this line of interpretation, the notion of centres and peripheries might also be eroded to some extent. For whilst the richness of the Portuguese archival record has allowed John II and Manuel I to be the protagonists of the previous pages, we are equally reminded of how similar stories unfolded in each of the places where, sooner or later, an African or Asian king reached out to the Portuguese (or, under duress, agreed) to become a tributary. In each of these places, local struggles unfolded in which the making of and control over diplomacy further afield played a central role. Without the political agency of rulers and their rivals in Africa and Asia, the Portuguese monarchs would have found it extremely difficult to play the role of global overlords. And without such diplomatic successes, they might have faced a stronger internal opposition than they did. All this does allow us to create balances where old imperial historiography was imbalanced. It allows us to question Eurocentric narratives, or indeed any narrative centred on a particular imperial tradition, not simply by postulating a sudden, overbearing relevance of the global, but precisely by anchoring the uses of specific, transcontinental links in local politics. In this sense, then, microhistories of the way diplomacy supported rulers during this period are directly relevant to our understanding of larger connections in the making.

And yet, still, this may not be quite the point at which we can easily lay the argument to rest; firstly, because global history needs to make sure it does not come across as celebrating the global uncritically; and secondly, because this article has so far very much continued a fairly entrenched tradition of not historicizing with due nuance the very notion of the global. We have gone through a scenario where it almost felt like a naturally compelling, self-evident entity was brought to life by diplomatic gestures as if it had just laid dormant all along. Then we observed a more detailed panorama where it somehow hovered, as an emerging novelty resulting from gestures to go *plus ultra*, but again as an inevitability of sorts, behind the more pertinent and grounded descriptor 'transcontinental'. We are thus compelled to go one crucial step further, and attempt to identify where exactly the global might sit, historically, with the stories already explored. This is a difficult move in that it *may* appear to take us several steps back, into close proximity with a pernicious historiographical tradition revolving around European exceptionalism. But it is a necessary one.

### III

#### A SPECIAL KIND OF GLOBAL: THE IBERIAN DREAM OF UNIVERSAL PREDOMINANCE

Having drafted a large map of early diplomatic relations intertwining the destinies of polities in Europe, Africa, Asia and even South America, and

then sounded the depths of such activities in a specific courtly setting, we need to pause and think about where exactly we wish the argument to take us. What implications might it carry for audiences less convinced than we are about the benefits of connected and global history? What does the argument so far actually tell us about the making of power imbalances between Europe and Asia? And how can it support an attempt to historicize the global through microhistorical exploration? I have argued recently, in the context of a triangular study of Sri Lanka, Portuguese and Habsburg empire-building, that we need to be clearer today than over the past twenty years about the potentially pernicious politics of identifying, historiographically, local–global interdependencies.<sup>76</sup> We should make sure we do not bury differences, divergences, disconnections and the building up of asymmetrical power relations under a well-intentioned, but ultimately problematic notion that after 1500 everything became interconnected. For here is where the danger of falling too naively for the notion of a ‘level playing field’ is also the greatest: yes, elites in Kotte (like at Kilwa, Malindi, Cochin and other places) did make use of the Portuguese for their own political games, and their rulers did dispatch things and even people to Lisbon in a way that bears many similarities with the behaviour of the Portuguese monarchs themselves. The well-documented efforts of the Portuguese monarchs are matched, to some extent, by the more scarcely documented deeds of Asian and African monarchs. But it is also important to recognize the limits of this argument.

All local political elites may look potentially global to us when queried with our connective toolbox, and all empires are somehow supported by the local. But some polities do also appear to have been more interconnected than others, and it becomes crucial to historicize how rulers in these particular places developed a grip on the making of the idea of the global. There is at times, behind the apparent flatness of global routes of communication and trade, a rather mountainous landscape in terms of power relations. The wealthiest and most powerful monarch of Sri Lanka only managed to send one official embassy to Lisbon during the entire sixteenth century, in 1541–3. True, the Kotte ambassador, Sri Ramaraksa, represented his king Bhuvanekabahu VII rather successfully at the Portuguese court. But how did the ambassador reach Lisbon? He got permission from a Portuguese

<sup>76</sup> Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires*, with reference to David Washbrook, ‘Problems in Global History’, in Berg (ed.), *Writing the History of the Global*; Jeremy Adelman, ‘What is Global History Now?’, *Aeon* (2017), <<https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment>> (accessed 20 February 2019); and the response in Richard Drayton and David Motadel, ‘Discussion: The Futures of Global History’, *Journal of Global History*, xiii, 1 (2018).

governor in Goa; he was taken on a ship from Colombo to Kochi, and from there on a Portuguese armada around the Cape to Lisbon; his negotiations at the Portuguese court were always grounded in the notion that John III was overlord to Bhuvanekabahu VII; he learned to speak Portuguese; he was brought back by another Portuguese armada; some years later, he became a Catholic; and eventually, his king was killed by a bullet fired by a Portuguese soldier from a Portuguese musket. Crucially as well, whilst the king of Kotte certainly kept trade alive with other networks and polities than those of the Portuguese, we have no *record* of him exchanging ambassadors with, say, Pegu, a Malay sultanate or China. Even at the most basic level, questions asked of globally connected academics by local audiences can become quite troubling: for example, what were the Portuguese doing in Colombo in the first place? Is it enough to state that they felt attracted by the prosperity, dynamism and cosmopolitan openness of economically and militarily superior Asian societies? Of course they often felt ‘discovered’ by Asians, marginal and subaltern in the face of immensely rich and powerful Asian polities.<sup>77</sup> But in a number of places this awe soon receded to give way to a growing hubris. Such asymmetries and imbalances demand a ‘connected histories’ approach that is critical enough to contain them.

Many rulers across the globe may have entertained long-distance connections with the Portuguese monarchs, and later with other European kings, states and companies. Some (in China, in the Mughal Empire, in Safavid Persia) certainly did think of themselves as standing far above the Europeans, and thus in no need to dispatch their own envoys to Europe (‘Let them come to us’, they might have proclaimed in a manifestation of strength).<sup>78</sup> Those were monarchs operating in conditions very different, though, from those of many lesser kings ruling in more vulnerable waterfront locations around the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. And in fact, even regarding the solid Universalist stances inherent to Mughal and Ming diplomacy, one can legitimately ask whether the outlook of North Indian and Chinese imperial figures regarding the *globe* as a political stage was quite equivalent to the imperial imagination developing in Iberia. Firstly, again, we cannot simply talk away the Iberian assets in the material sphere. Only the monarchs of Portugal and Spain maintained simultaneous diplomatic conversations (or outright conquests) and commercial exchanges across four continents. They

<sup>77</sup> Jorge M. Flores, ‘“They Have Discovered Us”: The Portuguese and the Trading World of the Indian Ocean’, in Jay Levenson (ed.), *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Washington, DC, 2007), ii, 185–93.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, the impressive picture in Jorge Flores, *Unwanted Neighbours: The Mughals, the Portuguese, and Their Frontier Zones* (New Delhi, 2018).

did so on grounds of an infrastructure — a communicational and transportation network — that they also controlled, including cutting-edge technologies such as advanced naval engineering, astronomical and mathematical calculus, and methods of measurement and cartography, allowing them to dispatch significant numbers of ships and people to distant places on their own terms. The two earliest known charts to represent Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas together were produced precisely between 1500 and 1502 in the two cities that saw the greatest accumulation of political and scientific interest in the globe as a whole: Seville and Lisbon.<sup>79</sup> This is not to say that Iberian monarchs controlled the planet, but that they could understandably think of themselves as sitting in a singularly privileged location, from which their polities and the religion they were built around could expand further than any other. They were, after all, lords of all they listed in their royal titles, not just by their own efforts, but by divine grace.<sup>80</sup>

Secondly, there is the way the Iberian monarchs divided the world in 1494 with the help of an abstract meridian drawn through the Atlantic and stipulating, quite simply, that there were now only two legitimate spheres of suzerainty, sitting on top of everything else with an ambition to contain the globe. In each of the two hemispheres, one monarch might do what he wished, imposing tribute or proceeding to conquest wherever he could. Whilst we have observed the heavy reliance of the Portuguese crown in particular on local political inputs, it also seems important not to lose sight of a very specific, novel conception of the globe that drove and supported, intellectually and in terms of geographical vision, Iberian imperial expansion. Rulers from the Moluccas to west Africa may have played a crucial role in supporting the fashioning of a distant king of kings with global ambitions, and that story needs to be explored much further than it has been so far; but they had little control over the way the globe itself was being negotiated as an Iberian intellectual and political construct, in Europe, in a process leading up to the Treaty of Zaragoza signed between John III and Charles V in 1529. The seeds were thus planted for an imaginary of global domination radiating from

<sup>79</sup> On the Juan de la Cosa map of c.1500, see Juan Manzano Manzano, *Los Pinzones y el Descubrimiento de América* (Madrid, 1988). On the 1502 Cantino planisphere, see Joaquim A. Gaspar, 'Blunders, Errors and Entanglements: Scrutinising the Cantino Planisphere with a Cartometric Eye', *Imago Mundi*, lxiv, 2 (2012).

<sup>80</sup> An aspect that, again, deserves to be considered as supporting the transgression of rules applying to other humans, especially those surrounding kings and potentially checking their powers, see Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge, 2019).

Europe, which may have been embryonic and ‘unrealistic’ in many ways, but which had an enormous potential for growth in the mind.

Many Universalisms had existed before, many thrived later on, and the way Europeans interacted with imperial mandates such as those of the Mughals or the Sons of Heaven in China remains key to an understanding of the early modern world. Yet around 1480–1520, there is also a more particular story to be told about two monarchs based in the south-west of Europe, who began to imagine a sphere of suzerainty that was identical with the entirety of the globe as it was becoming navigable and measurable, in terms of latitudes and longitudes, by their own subjects. This new globe, both abstract and palpable, was to offer much resistance to attempts at domination over the following centuries. It was appropriated in manifold ways by other rulers, developed further outside of Europe, and can by no means be described as a stable entity after 1529. Even amongst the most hawkish proponents of empire in Europe, it took time to develop its full disruptive potential. But it was a very powerful device starting already to affect European minds. The effect of having unrivalled transoceanic reach along with handling a freshly rediscovered mathematical concept — the Ptolemaic globe — to describe the planet was huge on the self-understanding and self-fashioning of the Iberian monarchs. The Iberian courts may have been profoundly dependent on local power dynamics inside the peninsula and elsewhere, and relied on a myriad other courts to function as hubs for long-distance diplomacy and trade. But they were also global in a way not quite matched, around 1500, by anyone else, and there are strong reasons to reintegrate this story into the global history debate today.

A microhistorical approach, here, would consist of exploring the above-mentioned royal title of Manuel I (or the bezoar stone from Cochin, or the monstrance made of tribute gold from Kilwa) not just in relation to its socio-political contexts, but to the intellectual battles under way in Iberia at the same time. Claiming lordship or overlordship from Morocco to the East Indies in 1499 was a gesture that started to fill the spatial abstraction agreed upon diplomatically at Tordesillas in 1494. Between a meridian running through the Atlantic and another, not yet reached, running through lands and seas on the other side of the globe, an expanse suddenly existed that covered exactly half of the surface of the planet — complemented by another half that fell to the kings of Spain. Manuel I, one must remember, had introduced the armillary sphere (a geocentric model of the cosmos based on Ptolemy), an object with a complex transcontinental history of its own but appropriated to represent the Portuguese expansionist project on grounds of its astronomic and mathematical functions, into the official

imagery of the monarchy.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, this king was sworn as heir to the entirety of *Hispania* not long before the Gama expedition to India, nurturing the prospect that the two halves of the globe might soon be united.<sup>82</sup>

Of course the notion that two monarchs could thus control the entire globe among themselves was ludicrous, as absurd to the untrained eye as Columbus' ceremonies of possession in the Caribbean, based upon the notion that he was 'not contradicted' by peoples who could not even understand his language. But, as has been shown for the latter example, the absurd has its own logic: once placed into its historical, intellectual context, the gesture is perfectly, frighteningly rational.<sup>83</sup> And the same applies to the establishment of a global imperial mandate. Two Iberian monarchs seized upon a concept deriving from a scientific method with its own, deep (and indeed transcontinental) history, and gave the old idea of a global space describable with the help of an abstract grid of latitudes and longitudes, connecting the surface of the planet with the outer spheres of the cosmos, a new lease of life.<sup>84</sup> The Ptolemaic grid, revived in the fifteenth century and deployed to impose a new order on the planet's surface even before it was circumnavigated, paved the way for a pernicious intertwining of science and politics on the global stage it itself helped to fabricate. It reified global space in new ways and allowed for the emergence of a whole lineage of imperial meridians made up in European minds, thus shaping the world we live in like few other ideas. A microhistory of how this idea exploded into the world, how the transcontinental became global in 1494 at Tordesillas, in 1499 with the proclamation of Manuel I, or in 1529 with the Treaty of Zaragoza, and what effects this particular idea had in the sixteenth century, is something that is, oddly enough, still to be written.

#### IV

#### CONCLUSION

The first and especially the second section of this article suggest that it is possible to examine transcontinental links microhistorically as a function of structurally similar, culturally commensurate, local political struggles,

<sup>81</sup> See Ana Maria Alves, *Iconologia do Poder Real na Época Manuelina: À procura de uma linguagem perdida* (Lisbon, 1983).

<sup>82</sup> Góis, *Chronica*, fos. 22–25<sup>v</sup> (chapters xxvii–xxx).

<sup>83</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, 1991), 52–85.

<sup>84</sup> On the main cartographic developments of this period, see David Woodward, 'Cartography and the Renaissance: Continuity and Change', in *The History of Cartography*, iii, *Cartography in the European Renaissance* (Chicago, 2007), 3–24.

and vice versa. It would make sense, especially along the lines explored in the second section, to delve in more detail into, for example, that moment in 1499 when Manuel I used Vasco da Gama, a representative of a rival court faction, to further his own image as a global monarch; or into the way Asian and African ambassadors were received at Iberian courts; or into the exchange of specific gifts in specific places, or tensions arising from specific diplomatic gaffes, or specific letters and treaties throwing light on local events that shaped global connections. All these themes call for microhistorical explorations, and in a number of areas the materials are there to attempt them — material objects, for example, often allow for close readings that can support dense and detailed narratives of diplomatic dialogues, as do certain texts and maps.

The third section of this article then reminds us of the risks of isolating such studies from the problem of global imbalances both in terms of actual power projection and in terms of emerging geographical conceptions. To talk about European exceptionalism, or rather, a specifically Iberian or European understanding and handling of the global, certainly prompts memories of ghosts we would rather not wish to awaken. Yet it seems equally problematic, at this point, entirely to ignore those vexed questions. Where the *cakravartis* of Lanka, residing at Kotte and presiding over a complicated constellation of suzerainties, saw themselves as ‘Turners of the Wheel’ in one specific island, the Portuguese kings they paid tribute to claimed global authority by referring to the armillary sphere, a mathematically conceived representation of the cosmos as a whole, along with which came the very possibility of both knowing and controlling the globe as a whole. To write a microhistory of the global would, in this regard, entail a microhistorical study of the *idea* of the global as it emerged specifically in Lisbon at that moment in time and was not meant to be grounded in any other location.

This is not to question the legitimacy of a globally framed and widely, horizontally interconnected microhistory of the global — that is, an approach taking on the challenge of carrying out multiple microhistorical analyses and interpretations across the continents, focusing on the ways the global was produced, perceived, thought about, handled politically or indeed opposed, by certain sectors of societies exposed to others through long-distance diplomacy. Once the idea of a single globe was put into the world and into action, it could be seized upon by others. To study the making of the global *stricto sensu* as an idea mooted in Iberia in the late 1400s does not mean that this process itself cannot be provincialized and placed in dialogue with other processes in a variety of ways. As Alan Strathern has pointed out recently, to acknowledge that something changed in the world around 1490 does not amount to subjecting everything that came after to European agency. In

contrast with the high imperialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the early modern period may be distinguishable precisely on grounds of the 'Asian and African capacity to respond to and take advantage of the new conjuncture'.<sup>85</sup> Batticaloa, Kotte, Cochin, Kilwa, Beijing, Agra, Tenochtitlán or Istanbul are as important in this regard as Lisbon, Seville, Madrid or Rome.<sup>86</sup> There is, here, a fourth and very significant way of locating the global, about which we already know a lot, and which is bound to develop further as the connective and comparative methods evolve.<sup>87</sup>

If we keep all options open, the proposal of producing microhistories of the global as an idea, a thing of the imagination supported at the time by material, human and ideational flows, seems both feasible and desirable at this point. Further explorations into how this idea developed in relation to, and sometimes as a result of, interactions and appropriations across the continents carry the promise of exhilarating intellectual and historiographical challenges. It should come as no shock that the idea of globality itself was and remains simultaneously wonderful and pernicious — *mirabile* and *misera-bile*, as Machiavelli might have had it — and that we ought to explore both qualities.<sup>88</sup> If we had the eyes of chameleons, we might try to keep one of them on Iberia, while the other could roam the planet. What picture such a combination of foci might produce, we are yet to discover.

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<sup>85</sup> Alan Strathern, 'Global Early Modernity and the Problem of What Came Before', in Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen (eds.), *The Global Middle Ages* (Past and Present Supplement no. 13, Oxford, 2018), 323.

<sup>86</sup> Again, Strathern, 'Global Early Modernity' offers an excellent take on the dilemma. Two earlier articles worthy of mention are Randolph Starn, 'The Early Modern Muddle', *Journal of Early Modern History*, vi, 3 (2002); and Jack Goldstone, 'The Problem of the "Early Modern" World', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, xli, 3 (1998).

<sup>87</sup> See, obviously, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Hanover, NH, 2011); and Serge Gruzinski, *What Time is it Over There? America and Islam at the Dawn of Modern Times* (Cambridge, 2010), among many titles by these two authors and others.

<sup>88</sup> See Daniel S. Mayfield, *Artful Immorality — Variants of Cynicism: Machiavelli, Gracián, Diderot* (Berlin and Boston, 2015), 146–7.