Introduction

We live in an unusual age. For most of history, international systems have consisted of a bewildering diversity of political units, ranging from city-leagues through to feudal monarchies, confederacies and sprawling imperial realms. By contrast, ours is an insistently homogeneous era, the diversity of an earlier time now succeeded by a global monoculture of sovereign states. The sovereign state's universal triumph in the post-World War II era is too often seen as evidence of an inexorable historical logic, by which greater interaction between the world's political communities inevitably compelled a convergence in polity forms. The conviction that political communities will increasingly resemble one another as interaction between them rises is deeply ingrained in mainstream International Relations (IR) theories, even if scholars differ as to why this nexus between interaction and homogenization supposedly exists. From the vantage point of today's sovereign state monoculture, this equation of increased interaction with unit homogenization seems plausible. Against the wider backdrop of world history prior to 1945, however, it seems hopelessly parochial, ignoring the persistent heterogeneity in polity forms that has characterized global politics for the greater part of the modern era.

How can we account for the emergence, operation and persistence of durably diverse international systems? This is the central research puzzle we address in this book. Focusing specifically on the Indian Ocean region from 1500 to 1750 – the cradle of what has been dubbed 'oriental globalization' – we seek here to explain how and why interaction reinforced heterogeneity during the early modern era.[1] Already the flywheel of trade between Africa, Asia and Europe from the middle of the first millennium of the common era, from the late fifteenth century onwards the Indian Ocean region saw a marked increase in

[1] J. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 36.

both the diversity of its polity types, and the scale and frequency of interaction between them. Portuguese crusaders, sent by their king to find spices and Christian allies in the East; vast Mughal cavalry armies from Central Asia, their leaders proudly claiming direct descent from Genghis Khan; the Dutch and English East India Companies – the forerunners of today's multinational corporations and the vanguards of the West's eventual conquest of Asia – each differed radically from one another in their cultural outlooks, institutional forms and political and economic goals.

Against many International Relations theorists' expectations of interaction driving convergence, however, these different polity forms co-existed for centuries alongside one another, together constituting a richly diverse and durable international system. Concentrating on these examples of statist, imperial and corporate polity forms, we establish in this study how this diversity first emerged, and explain why competition failed to produce convergence towards a common polity form. We further explain how heterogeneous actors successfully stabilized their relations with one another without the benefit of possessing shared norms and common cultural understandings. Finally, we demonstrate how this historical heterogeneity continued to profoundly structure the international politics of the Indian Ocean region even following the advent of full-blown Western colonialism from the late eighteenth century.

Mainstream International Relations theories – beholden to the view that increased interaction should call forth a greater uniformity in polity forms over time – anticipate that the centuries-long process of global integration dating from the sixteenth century should have corresponded with a progressive convergence towards a common polity form. But with the very late exception of the state's universalization after the collapse of European colonial empires from the late 1940s to the mid 1970s, the historical record firmly contradicts such expectations. Considering the first 'wave' of globalization in particular – marked by the European conquest of the Americas, the rise of the transatlantic slave trade and the growth of European maritime expansion in Asia – we see not homogenization, but rather a reinforcement of pre-existing diversity.[2]

[2] On the three 'waves' of globalization, located respectively in the sixteenth century, the nineteenth century and the post-1945 era, see generally R. Robertson, *The Three Waves of Globalization: A History of a Developing Global Consciousness* (London: Zed Books, 2003).

The historical prevalence of heterogeneous international systems is deeply disorienting for most International Relations theorists. Such systems appear by their very existence to confound some of the discipline's most basic assumptions about what international politics is and how international systems should work. Traditionally preoccupied with the problem of securing order among like units dwelling in anarchy, IR scholars have paid less attention to the challenges presented by hierarchical international systems, and less still to heteronomous systems governed neither by an exclusive logic of anarchy nor hierarchy.[3] The assumption that international politics is the domain of relations between functionally equivalent like units – sovereign states – has absolved IR scholars from having to explain the processes of interaction between unlike units. At critical points in global history, functionally dissimilar polities co-existed without the stabilizing ballast of either the conventions of a sovereign state system or the commands of an imperial international order. Far from being a transient symptom of disorder, a diversity of polity forms in fact helped to constitute order within such systems. But with a few exceptions, the field has remained generally silent on how we are to make sense of international relations within the heterogeneous international systems that have predominated for most of world history.[4]

[3] Recently, a profusion of studies have begun to redress IR's prior neglect of hierarchy in international politics. See, for example, A. Cooley and H. Spruyt, *Contracting States: Sovereign Transfers in International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 2009); T. Dunne, 'Society and Hierarchy in International Relations', *International Relations* 17:3 (2003), pp. 303–20; D. C. Kang, 'The Theoretical Roots of Hierarchy in International Relations', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 58:3 (2004), pp. 337–52; D. A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); and J. C. Sharman, 'International Hierarchies and Contemporary Imperial Governance: A Tale of Three Kingdoms', *European Journal of International Relations* 19:2 (2013), 189–207. By contrast, heteronomy remains extremely understudied, barring John Ruggie's seminal discussion of the medieval to modern transition in Western Europe. See J. G. Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations', *International Organization* 47:1 (1993), pp. 139–74.

[4] One of the best early studies on heterogeneous international systems remains Y. H. Ferguson and R. W. Mansbach, *Polities: Authority, Identities, and Change* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996). For an excellent recent argument for heterogeneity as a routine feature of international systems, see J. Mulich, 'Microregionalism and Intercolonial Relations: The Case of the Danish West Indies, 1730–1830', *Journal of Global History* 8:1 (2013), pp. 72–94.

The very messiness of heterogeneous international systems has encouraged the field either to neglect such systems entirely or to relegate them to a remote and incomprehensible past, casting them as idiosyncratic and transient preludes to the 'real' international politics that emerged after 1945. This relegation stems in part from the field's natural preoccupation with making sense of contemporary puzzles in global politics, where assumptions of unit homogeneity can be taken as a constant. This analytic bias is, however, reinforced by a frequently unacknowledged normative bias among many IR scholars, which identifies institutional and cultural homogeneity as synonymous with international order, and institutional and cultural heterogeneity with disorder. This bias for monocultures over mixed international systems is prevalent to varying degrees of self-consciousness across many theoretical traditions: classical realist nostalgia for *ancien régime* Europe's ideological unipolarity; liberal prescriptions for international integration through universal marketization and democratization; English School apprehensions over the post-colonial 'revolt against the West'; even many constructivist claims that international order is rooted in common constitutional values and institutional practices. All implicitly reject the idea of order in diversity, seeing mixed international systems as either way-stations to a more ordered and homogeneous future or as symptoms of the fragmentation and decline of international orders.[5]

This refusal to confront the typical and defining untidiness of past international systems – and to therefore establish how diversity rather than uniformity might work to constitute order between political communities – is problematic for two main reasons. First, constricting our frame of reference to sovereign state systems (or occasionally to imperial hierarchies) is fundamentally harmful for purposes of theory-building. A neglect of heterogeneous international systems encourages us to mistake contingent outcomes (e.g. Europe's post-medieval convergence towards the sovereign state) as evidence of supposedly universal relationships (e.g. interaction causes convergence). In so doing, it forecloses consideration of alternative ways in which order might be maintained between political communities.

[5] An excellent overview and critique of assumptions in international thought equating homogeneity with order can be found in F. Halliday, 'International Society as Homogeneity: Burke, Marx, Fukuyama', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21:3 (1992), pp. 435–61.

Second, a failure to adequately theorize the dynamics of heterogeneous international systems leaves scholars unable to make sense of international relations as played out in the crucial centuries following the post-1500 first wave of globalization. From the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth century, expanding webs of military, economic and cultural exchange knitted the populations of the Old and New Worlds together on a historically unprecedented scale.[6] This surge in interaction occurred in an age fundamentally different from our own, when neither the West nor the sovereign state was dominant. That successive waves of truculent Westerners were able to inveigle their way into Asia's bazaars and palaces – despite lacking either decisive military or institutional advantages over their originally far wealthier hosts – is a crucially important puzzle for understanding how the present global international order came to be. It is nevertheless one that International Relations theory remains unable to address without a framework for comprehending the dynamics of heterogeneous international systems.

The concerns driving this book are thus both theoretical and historical in nature. Theoretically, we aim to correct the conviction that increased interaction capacity within international systems will inevitably drive a convergence in polity forms over time. We take 'interaction capacity' to refer to 'the level of transportation, communication and organization capability in the unit/system that determines what types and levels of interaction are possible'.[7] Existing theories expect that military or economic competition will promote convergence through processes of Darwinian competition and Lamarckian institutional learning, or that convergence will result as polities increasingly conform to common standards of legitimacy. Against these mechanisms of competition, learning and conformity, we propose an alternative perspective to account for the puzzle of persistent diversity.

While existing International Relations theories conventionally assume a functional equivalence among polities, our story of the Indian Ocean starts from the proposition that different polities (sovereign states, empires or chartered company sovereigns like the Dutch and English East India Companies) want different things and go about

[6] On this point, see A. G. Hopkins, 'Introduction: Globalization – An Agenda for Historians', in A. G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 4–5.

[7] B. Buzan and R. Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 441.

getting them in different ways. These differences in ends and means may enable different polity types to potentially escape the zero-sum competitive logic that frequently defines relations between functionally equivalent like units. But if diversity is favoured when polities are sufficiently *different* from one another as to avoid symmetrical zero-sum competition, it can be made more durable when they possess sufficient *congruences* in compatible beliefs concerning the organization of political authority, and when actors are willing to reconcile these congruent beliefs through reciprocal processes of localization. Thus, even though the Mughals and the Dutch and English company sovereigns came from different mental universes, both could accept shared and overlapping authority claims according to which two rulers would hold different sovereign prerogatives over the same territory. Both engaged in practices of localization to legitimize and stabilize the resulting accommodations. These three conditions of different preferences, congruent beliefs grounded in heteronomous conceptions of political authority, and practices of localization, explain how a durably diverse international system composed of unlike units can arise and endure.

We illustrate this argument through an examination of the international relations of the Indian Ocean international system from *c.* 1500 to 1750. It is through the in-depth study of this region that we hope to make a substantive historical contribution. Already host to key transcontinental trading routes linking Africa, Europe and Asia from as far back as the seventh century,[8] from 1500 the Indian Ocean emerged as simultaneously the primary site of European–Asian military and diplomatic interaction, the locus of early modern trade between Africa, Asia and Europe, and the world's premier civilizational 'turntable' of cross-cultural exchange.[9] Global historians increasingly acknowledge the Indian Ocean international system as 'ground zero' for early modern globalization.[10] Its crucial historical importance notwithstanding, International Relations has almost totally neglected the Indian Ocean.

[8] K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[9] P. J. Katzenstein, 'A World of Plural and Pluralist Civilizations: Multiple Actors, Traditions and Practices', in P. J. Katzenstein (ed.), *Civilizations in World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 35.

[10] K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); M. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Beyond merely recovering regional particularity, however, the broader historical contribution lies in our challenge to a Eurocentric view of global history that remains implicit but pervasive throughout much of the field.[11] Notwithstanding their key differences, most International Relations theories remain informed by a historical narrative grounded in three claims. First, late medieval Latin Christendom is viewed as having been unusually politically fragmented relative to other civilizational centres.[12] Second, this exceptional political fragmentation subsequently created a space for the modern sovereign state's early emergence that supposedly did not exist in other Old World societies, especially the major empires of South and East Asia. Third, the West's precocious modernity, and specifically its early development of the sovereign state, allowed it to then coercively remake the world's polities along Western lines through imperialism and then decolonization.

Against this conventional Western exceptionalism, we demonstrate that heteronomy was neither confined to the medieval period, nor was it specific to Western Europe. Instead, it was the very existence of culturally different but structurally congruent beliefs about the legitimacy of heteronomous institutions and practices that allowed Western insinuation into the Indian Ocean international system. Enjoying military advantages only in the naval realm, vanguard agents of Western expansion such as the Portuguese Estado da Índia were dwarfed in wealth and power by Asian behemoths such as the Mughal Empire. For the Portuguese, as for the Dutch and English who succeeded them, this unfavourable balance of material capabilities ensured that ingratiation and insinuation predominated over imposition as the primary means of expanding their influence within the richer and more populous societies they encountered in Asia.

Drawing from the work of specialist international legal historians who have established the ubiquity of legal pluralism in the early modern world, we stress the importance of shared traditions of heteronomy, brought into rough alignment through improvised practices of localization, in enabling Europeans to establish an enduring toehold

[11] On IR's persistent and entrenched Eurocentrism, see generally J. M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[12] Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond', pp. 148–9.

along Asia's maritime margins.[13] This approach departs radically from the traditional triumphalist 'rise of the West' historiography that has typically informed IR interpretations of the modern global international system's evolution. This view has stressed Western institutional innovation, rather than Afro-Eurasian institutional congruence, in explaining the dynamics of Western expansion.[14] According to the conventional Eurocentric perspective, the rise of the West in the early modern Indian Ocean region was driven by the material advantage provided by superior European military technology, and the institutional advantage provided by the sovereign state. The evidence presented in this book shows the first to be marginal and the second illusory.

The argument summarized

How can we explain the proliferation and survival of diverse, unlike units in an environment of increasing interaction? How does a heteronomous international system work? And how does a better understanding of such a system deepen our knowledge of European engagement with the wider world in the centuries before Western dominance? The temporal starting point for our argument is the arrival of new actors in the Indian Ocean: the Portuguese from around the Cape of Good Hope after 1497; the Mughals from Central Asia in 1526; and the Dutch and English East India Companies from the early 1600s. Our opening claim here is that these actors were indeed diverse, representing contrasting statist, imperial and corporate forms, and that their entry and subsequent relations represented a step-level increase in

[13] For a recent synthesis of the literature on legal pluralism and early modern history, see L. A. Benton and R. J. Ross (eds.), *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500–1850* (New York University Press, 2013).

[14] Prominent examples of the 'rise of the West' genre include V. D. Hanson, *Why the West Has Won: Carnage and Culture from Salamis to Vietnam* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002); E. Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); W. H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (University of Chicago Press, 2009); and G. Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). In fairness, McNeill retreats significantly from Eurocentrism in later editions of *The Rise of the West*, without completely abandoning a hypothesis of Western power resting primarily on Western institutional superiority.

interaction within an already densely interconnected world region. Our second task is to explain how this interaction actually reinforced diversity. We address these matters systematically in the following chapters, but foreshadow these two successive components of our main argument – the emergence of diversity and its subsequent perpetuation – briefly below.

Establishing diversity

What were the dominant polity types in the early modern Indian Ocean, and how were they distinguishable from one another? Let us begin with the Portuguese Estado da Índia, the polity that most closely resembled the modern sovereign state. The king of Portugal established the viceroyalty of the Estado da Índia in 1505. After an extraordinarily rapid period of conquest in the next decade, the Portuguese controlled a network of forts and ports from Mozambique to the Persian Gulf, to Malacca and the Spice Islands, with further trading posts in China and Japan. All of these entrepôts, and the whole Indian Ocean, were claimed for the Portuguese king, to be ruled by his representative in Goa. Although not matching the ideal-type of the modern sovereign state, the resulting structure has nevertheless been described as 'precociously statist'.[15]

Specifically, the Portuguese favoured a centralized structure of authority that flowed directly down from the king to the governor of the Estado da Índia, and then to his subordinate officials, and extended in scope to military and commercial as well as administrative affairs.[16] The strict vertical, unified chain of command, the pattern of direct appointment from the administrative centre, and the public control of military and economic prerogatives gave the Estado da Índia a modern statist cast that is conspicuously lacking from either the imperial or corporate sovereign models. Despite the consensus about the state being the best-adapted institutional form to survive the rigours of

[15] J. E. Wills Jr., 'Was There a Vasco da Gama Epoch? Recent Historiography', in A. Disney and E. Booth (eds.), *Vasco da Gama and the Linking of Europe and Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 354.

[16] A. R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); S. Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia 1500–1700* (London: Blackwell-Wiley, 2012); M. N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India and Portugal in the Early Modern Period* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

international military and commercial competition, the Estado da Índia was never the region's dominant polity form, eventually being marginalized by the company sovereigns that succeeded it.

Certainly the most powerful units in the Indian Ocean region after 1500 were continental empires, especially the Safavids (from 1501), the Ottomans (after their conquest of Egypt in 1517) and the Mughals (from 1526). Because it was the most central to the region's development, we focus on the Mughal Empire, though historians have noted close similarities in the political forms of these three empires.[17] The Mughals emerged from Central Asia after 1526 to conquer most of South Asia. While never completely dominant throughout the entire subcontinent, the Mughals rapidly established their hegemony across the Indo-Gangetic plain. This laid the foundation for a power formation of truly prodigious proportions. By 1600, the Mughal Empire included more people (approximately 100 million) and greater fiscal and military resources than every polity in Christian Europe combined.[18] This preponderance of material power ultimately allowed the Mughals to set the terms of European engagement with much of the Indian Ocean international system for most of the early modern period. The layered and heteronomous conception of authority in the Mughal Empire was critical in allowing Europeans' entry into the Indian Ocean world, and in enabling the growth of hybrid European–Asian authority arrangements.

The empire was a hierarchical but at the same time polyglot agglomeration. The imperial court relied extensively on local intermediaries to uphold its rule. The empire's constituent communities were furthermore bound to the centre through customized compacts that varied significantly in their allocation of privileges and responsibilities.[19] This

[17] See, for example, D. E. Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press); S. Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); S. Subrahmanyam, 'A Tale of Three Empires: Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs in a Comparative Context', *Common Knowledge* 12:1 (2006), pp. 66–92.

[18] M. N. Pearson, 'Merchants and States', in J. D. Tracy (ed.), *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade 1350–1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 52.

[19] C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian* (London: Longman, 1989); D. H. Nexon and T. Wright, 'What's at Stake in the American Empire Debate', *American Political Science Review* 101:2 (2007), p. 253.