GLOBALISATION AND DIFFERENCE: Cosmopolitanism Before the Nation-State

Akhil Gupta[1]

Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology
Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-2145
akgupta@stanford.edu

Abstract

In this paper, I have tried to reflect on what cosmopolitanism might mean in a very different era of globalisation than the present. Although cosmopolitanism, as an expansive and sociable vision, is often contrasted with the geographically limited perspective and claustrophobic affinities of nationalism, the term originates in a historical period *before* the rise of nationalism in Europe. I argue that the residents of the civilisations around the Indian Ocean in the medieval and early modern world were cosmopolitan even by the standards of the high modernist meaning of the term. Not only did a range of people transact and translate across different languages, but they also knew how to conduct themselves in different cultural settings with people of different religious beliefs, while respecting the disparate religious, social, and cultural practices of their neighbours.

Introduction

When Vasco da Gama arrived in Calicut in May 1498, the inhabitants of that city had already heard about the Portuguese, no doubt from the many travellers who had encountered them as they plotted their voyage across the Arabian Sea from the East African port of Malindi. The Portuguese were guided from there to the land of spices by a Muslim pilot, Ahmad Ibn Majid, a native of Gujarat and an expert on the searoutes to the western coast of India (Shastry 2000:1). The first Portuguese ashore was the expedition's interpreter, a man called Juao Nomez, who spoke Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew and Arabic. He was taken to the house of two Tunisian merchants who greeted

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[1] Akhil Gupta is Professor of South Asian Studies at the University of California and is particularly interested in the anthropology of space and place.

him in Castillian Spanish with the curse, "The devil take you" and the question, "What brings you here?" He replied, "We come seeking Christians and spices."[2]

Jim Clifford claims that encounters such as these, what he calls the "Squanto effect", have come to occupy a paradigmatic place in his thinking about travel (Clifford 1997:18). Squanto was the Patuxet Indian who greeted the pilgrims in 1620 in Plymouth in fluent English, which he had learned as a result of having spent several years in Spain and England.

Such narratives usually provoke laughter but exactly why they tickle their readers is not altogether self-evident. The discovery narrative is one in which the (Western) reader is invited to participate in the cosmopolitan project (perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of the reader as being "interpellated"). Anthropologists have long been acquainted with such techniques of collusion, at least since the famous opening section of Malinowski's *Argonauts*: "Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails out of sight" (Malinowski 1961: 4). It is clear that the "you" who is being addressed in this passage is not a Trobriander.

Perhaps the humour in stories of the world-discovering traveller who endures great hardships and takes monumental risks to finally meet people who already know a great deal of the traveller's world arises from their inversion of those very hierarchies that these narratives implicitly set up. We laugh because the "native" turns out to be more cosmopolitan than the traveller: strike one for the underdog! Another reason perhaps why such stories evoke laughter is that they explicitly affirm a nagging feeling that the discoverer, the narrative's readers (and, by extension, the West), may not really be as cosmopolitan as he or they had assumed. But there may be a temporal dimension to the humor as well. In a historical and historicist mode of thinking, origin myths do not simply explain why the world is the way it is but insist on a rigorous accounting of first moments: the exact date of the first contact between worlds, cultures, peoples and ecologies. The very narratives that conventionally establish such beginnings—stories of discovery—turn out to be one-sided and show greater temporal depth on the other side; "we thought we had discovered them, but they already knew about us."

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[2] I first encountered this delightful story from Velho is cited in Cohn (1998:1).

I have so far employed the term "cosmopolitanism" in a manner that might legitimately draw an objection. How can one justify using this term for the "Age of Discovery" when it is of a much later provenance? The OED defines "cosmopolitanism" as i) belonging to all parts of the world, not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants; ii) having the characteristics which arise from, or are suited to, a range over many different countries, free from national limitations or attachments; and iii) composed of people from many different countries. The first usage of the term is traced to several texts in the 1840s, of which John Stuart Mill's is probably the most famous, "Capital is becoming more and more cosmopolitan." (OED 1971:568).

There is, however, a longer genealogy to the root term "cosmopolite." We learn from the OED that "cosmopolite" was commonly used in the seventeenth century. After falling into disfavour, it was revived in the nineteenth century, when it was contrasted either positively or negatively with "patriot" and "patriotic." But here the editors of the OED make a critical slip, one that tells us that even the guardians of historicity sometimes lapse into anachronisms. They define "cosmopolite" as: "A 'citizen of the world'; one who regards or treats the whole world as his country; one who has no *national* attachments or prejudices" (OED 1971:568; emphasis mine). The geographer and advocate of "discovery," Hakluyt is credited with having first used the term, but it is clear from the quotation that follows that nationalism played no role in Hakluyt's understanding of the cosmopolite: "To finde himselfe Cosmopolites, a citizen..of the..one mysticall citie vniuersall, and so consequently to meditate of the Cosmopoliticall gouernment thereof." (Hakluyt 1598:I.6). The antonym for "cosmopolite" was clearly not, or at least not yet in 1598, a word whose connotations included nationalist spirit or feeling.

Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism

I think it would be fair to say that the connotations of "cosmopolitanism" today are anchored in its nineteenth-century usage. Cosmopolitanism is almost always defined with reference to the nation-state, as the subtitle of Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins' important anthology demonstrates: "Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation." The negative character of the dictionary definitions of cosmopolitanism intrigues me: *not* to be restricted to any one country or its inhabitants; to be *free* of national limitations or attachments. In the hands of a fickle elite, cosmopolitanism could be interpreted (as it

often was) as irresponsible detachment from real politics and the struggles to realise or preserve the genuinely popular and class reformist tendencies within nationalism (Cheah 1998). But could the attraction of cosmopolitanism have lain somewhere else entirely? Is it possible that cosmopolitanism was the utopian counterfoil to the overt and hidden violence of nationalism, to the forced assimilation into one identity of ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional differences within often newly formed, territorially sovereign states? Like proletarian internationalism, cosmopolitanism's opposition to nationalism may have indicated not escape and detachment but recoil from the immanent and systemic violence of nationalism or a rejection of its claustrophobic vision.

One of the most important interventions made by Robbins' introduction to *Cosmopolitics* is that it at once reaffirms the centrality of the nation-state in our understanding of cosmopolitanism while simultaneously displacing the *oppositional* character of that relationship. Rather than its *detachment* from "the bonds, commitments, and affiliations that constrain ordinary nation-bound lives" (Robbins 1998:1), many scholars have urged us to think of cosmopolitanism as extending to transnational experiences that are unprivileged (perhaps even coerced) and particular rather than universal. Like nations, Robbins argues, cosmopolitanisms are today thought of as plural, particular, limited, empowered and imagined (1998:2). Robbins concludes that cosmopolitanism today is not conceived as being opposed to nationalism but as something that functions along with nationalism. Such a conclusion follows once the opposition between nationalism and cosmopolitanism has been shown to have always been an unstable one (Cheah 1998:22), particularly under conditions of globalisation.

However, once the conceptual distance between cosmopolitanism and nationalism has narrowed, does it dilute the analytical purchase and political power of cosmopolitanism as an oppositional position? It is here that globalisation introduces a fresh twist on the problem. If globalisation is introducing new tensions into the relationship between nation and state, it is also perforce causing us to reconceptualise cosmopolitanism. Jim Clifford has introduced the term "discrepant cosmopolitanisms" to emphasise "historical interconnection and often violent attachment" (Clifford 1998:365). He argues that the many different forms in which people perceive different forms of encounter, negotiation and affiliation in the world today cannot be captured by a

singular focus on identities, particularly national identity (Clifford 1998:365). Paul Rabinow has proposed the term "critical cosmopolitanism" which is "suspicious of sovereign powers, universal truths, overly relativised preciousness, local authenticity, moralisms high and low" (Rabinow 1986:258). Globalisation allows for, or enables, different forms of horizontal connection between peoples (for example, between NGOs working on human rights or environmental causes, or to choose a more current example, citizens' groups working against the imperialist warmongering of the Bush administration). Such connections can often undermine the sovereign claims of their own nation-states, but also help question the essentialist or ethnicized claims of particular peoples to certain rights or territories. Discrepant or critical cosmopolitanisms, thus, are not necessarily associated with progressive political agendas. Rather, they push us to think about how, in conditions of globalisation, cosmopolitanism is to be articulated with such agendas (Clifford 1998:366). "Separated from its (European) universalist moorings," Clifford warns us that the term *cosmopolitanism* "quickly becomes a travelling signifier, a term always in danger of breaking up into partial equivalences: exile, immigration, migrancy, diaspora, border crossing, pilgrimage, tourism" (Clifford 1998:363). Does the drift away from its Eurocentric universalist moorings speed up when cosmopolitanism is caught up in the eddies of globalisation?

Discrepant Globalisations?

A narrative that charts the history of cosmopolitanism from its initial position of opposing the nation-state to its discrepant location vis-a-vis national identities under globalisation might well constitute a reasonable genealogy of the term since the nineteenth century. But does it seriously lead us askew about the history of the term? Cheah, for example, makes a convincing case that cosmopolitanism could not have possibly meant the overcoming of national particularisms because when cosmopolitanism came to be articulated as ideology and as practice, the popular national state did not exist in Europe and the doctrine of nationalism was not yet fully articulated (Cheah 1998:22). Cosmopolitanism then was an oppositional stance to absolutist *statism*, since the territorial state was not yet hitched to an ideology of nationalism (Cheah 1998:22-25). By locating cosmopolitanism in the period after the rise of sovereign, territorial states but before the arrival of nationalism on the world-historical scene, Cheah points to a vital gap in much of the literature on nationalism and

globalisation being produced today. In this literature, the shallow historical frame in which globalisation is understood leads to some unproductive oppositions and zero-sum assumptions about its relation to the nation-state. The contentious debate about whether globalisation is making nation-states stronger or weaker would be better served by paying a little historical attention to the question of how the hyphen between the nation-state slid so snugly into place. As Cheah points out, we would then understand that territorially sovereign states preceded nations and nationalisms by at least a couple of centuries in Europe, and it was by no means evident that the thousand or so *state*-like units that constituted Europe in the fourteenth century would be reduced to fewer than thirty *nation-states* by World War I (Tilly 1975:76). The creation of nation-states, in other words, involved a massive reduction in sovereign territorial units, and an equally momentous reorganisation of culture and identity under the banner of nationalism whose significance and scale have yet to be recognised in the scholarly literature on nationalism.

That, however, is only the story inside a still-nascent Europe or a Europe that was yet to be defined (a continuing project to be sure). Did cosmopolitanism elsewhere also emerge as an anti-statist ideology? What did it mean to be cosmopolitan in the Ottoman Empire or in the Vijaynagar Empire in India? Is it possible to ask, as Shelly Pollock (2000) does, what a cosmopolitan history of cosmopolitanism might look like? More importantly, since the cosmopolite emerges as a category within Europe in the context of discovery (it is no surprise that Hakluyt is the first to use the term), is it in fact possible **not** to write a Eurocentric history of cosmopolitanism? Very little of the discussion of cosmopolitanism refers to any place outside Europe, yet it is clear that restricting the domain to Europe undermines the concept of cosmopolitanism. A discussion of cosmopolitanism, which is restricted to European history and the European experience, needs therefore to begin with the declaration of its own impossibility.

Pollock has argued that the concept of cosmopolitanism could usefully be extended back to account for the rise of the very vernaculars that form the bedrock of national states (Pollock 2000). In his view, the cosmopolitan is opposed not to the nation-state, but to "the vernacular." He contrasts an earlier moment of globalisation in which societies and civilisations moved from a cosmopolitan literary tradition to one grounded

in vernaculars with the current moment of globalisation in which those vernaculars are giving way to new cosmopolitanisms. The vernacular millennium that begins after 1000 AD, Pollock argues, displaced translocal, cosmopolitan literary languages with vernacular tongues. In Europe, this movement to the vernacular accompanied and eventually enabled the nation-state, but in India this did not happen (Pollock 2000:592). The world moved from a situation where languages like Sanskrit and Latin were widely employed in many different geographical, social and cultural settings to one where vernacular languages became the vehicle for literary expression and kingly rule. Pollock reminds us that cosmopolitanism is not a new concept by recalling the widespread use of Sanskrit: "There was nothing unusual about finding a Chinese traveller studying Sanskrit grammar in Sumatra in the seventh century, an intellectual from Sri Lanka writing Sanskrit literary theory in the northern Deccan in the tenth, or Khmer princes composing Sanskrit political poetry for the magnificent pillars of Mebon and Pre Rup in Angkor in the twelfth" (Pollock 2000:599).

The vernacular languages thus arose in opposition to the cosmopolitan orders of Latin and Sanskrit, and coalesced with political units that were organised in territorially less expansive terms. Thus, the very vernacularisation that is taken as the ground on which national orders and nationalist sentiment are built was itself constructed out of a reaction to cosmopolitan forms that had prevailed earlier. The globalising processes that created earlier forms of cosmopolitanism in Asia, however, differed from the current period in that the boundaries of Sanskrit culture were never demarcated, populations were not counted, and there was no standardisation of legal practices (Pollock 2000:604). As we seek to conceptualise discrepant cosmopolitanisms in the world today, we might well look to discrepant globalisations in and through which those cosmopolitanisms emerged.

The Cosmopolitan World of the Indian Ocean

As the center of the world economy, the Indian Ocean trade routes connected places from the coast of East Africa and the southern Mediterranean on one edge to the Spice Islands, the coast of China and the southwestern ports of Japan on the other end. These connections had a long history before the rise of Islam in the seventh century, but particularly thrived through the medium of Muslim seafarers from the seventh to the fifteenth centuries, ending when the Portuguese came and severely disrupted existing

trade networks. Not only did these networks lead to an incredible exchange of ideas, technologies and goods, they also brought people from different lands into contact with each other, often for extended periods of time. This created centers of cosmopolitanism that, in their extensiveness and reach, were comparable, and perhaps even more intensive, than anything we can observe in the world today - at a very different moment of globalisation. In this section, I will draw upon some examples from the writings of some famous visitors to India in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, before the arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498 (Chaudhuri 1985; Abu-Lughod 1989).

The earliest of the narratives I consider here owes to Ibn Battuta, the famous Arab traveller who started from his native Tangier in 1324. He spent some time at the court in Delhi and departed from there in July 1342 for Cambay and the southwest coast of India, from where he intended to sail to China. Almost a century separates Ibn Battuta from the Venetian Nicolo de Conti and Abdur Razzak Bin Jalaladdin Ishak As-Samarkandi, who was born in Herat and was sent, in 1442, as the ambassador of the emperor Shah Rukh, who built a successful Transoxanian successor state to that of Timur.[3] Nicolo de Conti is the anomaly in this group as he traveled with his wife and children. Some years later, a Russian visitor, Athanasius Nikitin, who probably traveled in India between 1468 and 1474, recorded his observations of the country. Finally, we have an abbreviated account from a certain Hieronimo de Santo Stefano, a Genoese merchant whose narrative was put to paper by someone else after his return at the turn of the century (Major 1857).

The first thing that strikes one on reading these different narratives is how consistent they are in their observations about the cosmopolitanism of the large trade emporia that they visited in the Indian Ocean. Abdur Razzak, for instance, says of Hormuz: "The merchants of seven climates, from Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, Azerbaijan, Iraq-Arabia, Iraq-Adjemi, the provinces of Fars, Khorasan [a region now in Iran and Afghanistan], Transoxiana, Turkistan, the kingdom of Kipchak in Tartary, the countries inhabited by the Kalmucks, the whole of the kingdoms of China and Machin [southern part of China], and the city of Peking, all make their way to this port" (Razzak in Major 1857:5-6). He then goes on to list all the places the inhabitants of Hormuz come from,

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[3] After Timur captured Herat in 1381, his son, Shah Rukh, built a kingdom that witnessed a cultural and economic renaissance.

and the list goes from China and Southeast Asia to Zanzibar and everything in between. He observes that persons of all religions, "even idolaters", are found in great numbers in the city, and no one is discriminated against, so much so that another name for the city is "Abode of Security (Dar-al-aman)" (Razzak in Major 1857:7). A couple of decades later, Nikitin similarly observes of Hormuz that it "is a vast emporium of all the world; you find there people and goods of every description, and whatever thing is produced on earth you find it in Hormuz. But the duties are high, one tenth of everything." (Nikitin in Major 1857:19).

Ibn Battuta gives us a detailed description of Cambay, the great emporium located on the coast in Gujarat, in which the cosmopolitan character of the city is even more apparent. He describes Cambay in these terms: "This city is one of the finest there is in regard to the excellence of its construction and the architecture of its mosques. The reason is that the majority of its inhabitants are foreign merchants, who are always building there fine mansions and magnificent mosques and vie with one another in doing so" (Ibn Battuta 1994:797). Although this was extremely unlikely, there had to be a lot of foreigners living in the town for Ibn Battuta not to have even made a note of the Hindu inhabitants of Cambay! In his *Suma Oriental* (1517), Tomé Pires gives us a very different picture, emphasising that "all the trade in Cambay is in the hands of the heathen. Their general designation is Gujaratis, and they are divided into various races—Banians, Brahmans and Pattars [all Hindu castes]. There is no doubt that these people have the cream of the trade....Those of our people who want to be clerks and factors ought to go there and learn, because the business of trade is a science in itself..." (Lach and Flaumenhaft 1965:19). Although 175 years separate the two accounts, it is extremely unlikely that there had taken place a wholesale shift in which communities lived and worked in Cambay. This becomes especially clear when Tomé Pires too notes the presence of a large number of foreign merchants in Cambay: "There are also some Cairo merchants settled in Cambay, and many Khorasans and Guilans from Aden and Hormuz, all of whom do a great trade in the seaport towns of Cambay" (Lach and Flaumenhaft 1965:19).

The governor of Cambay was a Muslim from Telengana (in central India) and his deputy was the Sheikh Zada of Isfahan, who after plotting to escape to his native land, finally manages to do so but only after the Sultan tries his best to prevent him. At a

banquet in his honor thrown by the governor, Ibn Battuta meets a "sharif from Baghdad" and later goes to meet an Islamic holy man who is resident there, Hajj Nasir from Diyarbakir. Ibn Battuta registers neither surprise nor amazement to meet people from areas that are now India, Iran, Iraq and Turkey in the western corner of Gujarat, and it is clear that these people have substantial social intercourse with each other, and that Afghanis and Abyssinians are also part of the mix. Let us now hear the voice of Hieronimo di Santo Stefano writing about a century and a half later. Having lost his fortune due to coercion and shipwreck, Santo Stefano writes: "I arrived in one of the said ships at Cambay, the chief of which is a Mohammedan, and a great lord. … Here I found some Moorish merchants of Alexandria and Damascus, by whom I was assisted with money for my expenses" (Stefano in Major 1857:9).

Cambay's multiethnic, multireligious and multilingual character is further complicated in a place like Calicut (now a part of the southwest province of India called Kerala), which is a meeting point of the circuits of trade that connect the Middle East to China and Southeast Asia. Ibn Battuta begins his description of Calicut thus: "[It] is one of the chief ports in Malabar. It is visited by men from China, Java, Ceylon, the Maldives, Yemen and Persia, and in it gather merchants from all quarters. Its harbor is one of the largest in the world" (Ibn Battuta 1994: 812). The head of Calicut's bustling harbor (the shahbhandar) is Ibrahim from Bahrain: "a worthy man, of generous habits, at whose house the merchants used to gather and to eat at his table" (Ibn Battuta 1994: 812). It is here that Ibn Battuta first observes Chinese boats, thirteen of which are docked at port, awaiting the season to set sail for China (Ibn Battuta 1994: 812-814). The largest of these ships, Ibn Battuta tells us, "carries a complement of a thousand men, six hundred of whom are sailors and four hundred men-at-arms …" (Ibn Battuta 1994: 813). When Ibn Battuta sets sail from Calicut for China, the factor in charge of his ship (junk) is a Syrian from Safad (Zefat in modern Israel) called Suleimaan (Ibn Battuta 1994: 814)!

When Abdur Razzak visits Calicut a century later, he notes that the town "contains a considerable number of Mussalmans, who are constant residents, and have built two mosques, in which they meet every Friday to offer up prayer" (Razzak in Major 1857:13-14). He further reports: "From Calicut are vessels continually sailing for Mecca, which are for the most part laden with pepper. The inhabitants of Calicut are adventurous sailors: they are known by the name of "sons of Chinese" and pirates do

not dare to attack the vessels of Calicut. In this harbour one may find everything that can be desired" (Razzak in Major 1857:19). Razzak also contrasts the naked bodies of the Hindus in Calicut, including the Samudri Raja (later to be called the "Zamorin" in Portuguese sources) with the "magnificent apparel" of the Muslims, who dressed themselves "in the manner of the Arabs" (Razzak in Major 1857:17). Later in the century, Hieronimo Stefano finds that "there are as many as a thousand houses inhabited by Christians" in this town (Stefano in Major 1857:5). The picture one obtains is of people who belonged to many different places in the world, who spoke different languages, had different cultural customs and practices, and professed different religions living peacefully with one another and transacting daily across a range of differences. We have here "face-to-face" communities that are about as far from the anthropological image of "traditional" societies as we are likely to get. And yet—this is my point—these *were* the traditional communities of the Indian Ocean. Cosmopolitanism was not something that these places had to cope with, an unwelcome invasion from an intrusive world, but globalisation was the normal state, one which was profoundly disrupted by colonialism (a peculiarly European form of globalisation) and nationalism.

We find another interesting example of such cosmopolitanism in Hieronimo's report of his adventures in Sumatra. Hieronimo tells us that "the chief is a Moor, but speaking a different language. In all the countries where we had been they spoke different languages" (Stefano in Major 1857:7). Hieronimo's companion has died *en route* and the chief in Sumatra threatens to seize all of Hieronimo's goods because according to the local custom, if a man dies and he has no heirs, the property belongs to the chief. Hieronimo's merchandise was placed in a sealed room until he could produce an inventory of goods that he had brought from Cairo with him. The chief would allow him to take his own goods but not those of his dead companion. Hieronimo reports, however, that "there was a qadi in that place who was very friendly to me, and who had some knowledge of the Italian language." With his help, Hieronimo is able to recover his goods, "but not without much expense and trouble" (Stefano in Major 1857:7-8).

Whereas the large emporia of the Indian Ocean might be expected to exhibit the cosmopolitanism noted above, would the same have been true of the small towns on the coasts or in the interior? Would the situation in such places not give us a better idea of

how widespread this phenomena was and whether it did in fact touch the lives of ordinary people on the subcontinent removed from the great trading entrepots? Here the evidence is less certain, but it does lead us to believe that cosmopolitanism was not by any means confined to the large coastal centers of commerce. Ibn Battuta's narrative is particularly interesting in this regard. As he travels from Delhi to Cambay, across the heartland of the Indian subcontinent, he reports meeting people from virtually all parts of West Asia and eastern Africa. Early in his journey, his entourage is attacked and he is taken into captivity. This band of "infidels" has amongst them two Muslims who interrogate him in Persian. He is eventually rescued by someone who greets him with the traditional Muslim greeting, then speaks to him in Persian. When he is rescued, the governor of the province returns his clothes to him, telling him only that they had been turned in by an "Arab from Egypt" (Ibn Battuta 1994:776-782). After Ibn Battuta resumes his ill-fated journey, he encounters Khattab the Afghani who rules over a small kingdom near the river Jamuna, who has in his army three hundred Afghani soldiers who successfully protect the town from an attack launched by a neighboring king massed with a much larger army (Ibn Battuta 1994:786). He subsequently meets the Abyssinian Badr who governs a neighboring province and whose bravery is proverbial (Ibn Battuta 1994:786); Muhammad ibn Bairam, the Turkish governor of Parvan; and finally Shaikh Ibrahim who is from the Maldives and who rules over the city of Zihar (Ibn Battuta 1994:792). Later on, the Russian traveller Nikitin was to extrapolate from his limited observations that "the rulers and nobles in the land of India are all Khorasanians" (Nikitin in Major 1857:12), since the kingdom of Bidar whose glory impressed him was largely defended by Khorasanian generals (Nikitin in Major 1857:14).

Nor is the diversity of peoples that Ibn Battuta encountered less impressive in the small towns and fishing villages dotting the coast of the Arabian Sea. Ibn Battuta reports reaching the town of Hili: "I met in [the town's mosque] a pious jurist from Mogadishu, called Sa'id, of fine figure and character. He used to fast continually, and I was told that he had studied at Mecca for fourteen years and for the same length of time at al-Madina … and had travelled in India and China" (Ibn Battuta 1994:809); a small distance away in a town called Jurfattan (which may be present day Cannanore), he met al-Sarsari, a "highly estimable jurist" from Baghdad whose name Ibn Battuta identified with a town ten miles from Baghdad on the Kufa road (Ibn Battuta 1994:810); finally, in the large

town of Panderani (now deserted), three quarters of which was Muslim and which boasted several fine mosques, he came across a very impressive preacher from Oman, who looked after the chief mosque (Ibn Battuta 1994:812). We can surmise that these people were not exceptional from the fact that the town of Honaver had no cultivated land, and depended entirely on maritime commerce for employment, as also from the fact that Chinese junks regularly reached Hili.

The Limits of Cosmopolitanism?

If by cosmopolitanism one means the seamless negotiation of difference, and the ability to operate in different cultural and social contexts without any difficulty whatsoever, then it could be argued that this is an utopian ideal which even the high modernist versions of that term could only gesture toward, but not ever possibly fulfill. Cosmopolitanism always has a shape, a character, an ethos and an ethics, and one of the ways in which we might start thinking about cosmopolitanism in different eras of globalisation is by comparing how the negotiation with difference varies in these eras. What are the blind spots, the aporias, the instabilities and the difference of particular forms of cosmopolitanism?

The travellers' narratives that I have been reading reveal at least three interesting moments or topics where cosmopolitanism is put into question, where differences become too difficult to negotiate, or where difficulties arise precisely because the traveller has in his cosmopolitanism "crossed over" and can no longer be tolerated within his own civilisational vernacular. These three areas have to do with the encounter with radically different forms of kinship, in this case Nayar matriliny; with questions of sexuality, particularly since all the travellers accounts I have so far encountered have been written entirely by men; and, finally, with the fraught question of religious conversion.

I can do no more than indicate what these areas are in the present paper, but each of these topics deserves much further exploration. All the travellers in my sample, men who were part of strong patriarchal, patrilineal and monotheistic religions and cultures (Islam and Christianity) were mystified and astonished at the Nayar practice of matrilineal descent. Abdur Razzak, for example, notes of the ruler of Calicut, the Samudri: "When he dies it is his sister's son who succeeds him, and his inheritance does

not belong to his son, or his brother, or any other of *his* relations" (Razzak in Major 1857:17; emphasis mine). In a patrilineal descent system, Abdur Razzak could not even imagine the sister's son as a *relation* of the patriarch. Similarly, he is both fascinated and appalled at what he thinks is the Nayar practice of polyandry: "it is the practice for one woman to have a great number of husbands, each of whom undertakes a special duty and fulfills it. The hours of the day are divided between them; each of them for a certain period takes up abode in the house, and while he remains there no other is allowed to enter" (Razzak in Major 1857:17). Abdur Razzak observes that the ruler, the Samudri, belongs to this sect. That a potentate, a ruler, would share a wife with other men may have crossed over, and not merely verged on the brink, of the thinkable. Nicolo Conti similarly observes: "In this district alone the women are allowed to take several husbands, so that some have ten or more. The husbands contribute amongst themselves to the maintenance of the wife, who lives apart from the husbands…The children are alloted to the husbands at the will of the wife" (Conti in Major !857:20). The Genoese traveller Hieronimo di Santo Stefano noted that, "Every lady may take to herself seven or eight husbands, according to her inclination" (Stefano in Major 1857:5). Men do not marry a woman who is a virgin; if a virgin is married, she "is delivered over before the nuptials to some other person for fifteen or twenty days in order that she may be deflowered" (Stefano in Major 1857:5). There is more than a hint of scandal in these observations. Given their consistency, we can only assume that this must have struck the Arabic and Italian men as a very strange and repellent practice, one that they clearly struggled to make sense of but could not fit within their paradigms. Since they, and many other men from other places did live in the Malabar region for extended periods of time (one thinks of the Jewish Alexandrian merchant, Ben Yiju, who plays such a large role in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*), we can only surmise that this was a practice that they had no wish to emulate. In fact, Ibn Battuta comments on the fact that when a Muslim died, the local rulers in the Malabar respected the inheritance laws of their community, and left the property to a leader of the community to pass on to its legal inheritor (Ibn Battuta 1994:810). I think we see here one of the limits of this era of cosmopolitan thought and practice.

Another area where one sees the operations of a particular kind of cosmopolitanism that may have remarkable parallels with a high modernist version is in the travellers' attitudes to sexuality. Like the texts of a generation of men of "artistic" temperament

who voluntarily went into exile or displacement in order to enter a cosmopolitan life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these travellers write voyeuristically of their sexual experiences with women in various lands. Clearly this information is intended to titillate their readers, but it also partakes of a long history of travel in which the connection to sexual conquest is quite explicit. The difference here might be that these narratives are not as easily conjoined to narratives of conquest that came out of Renaissance Europe, not least because the ideological orders that maintained a "heavenly kingdom on Earth" allowed for certain hierarchies and attitudes towards nature and Others that was not to be found in the same manner in other places and contexts (for example, in early modern Europe). Ibn Battuta, for example, after commenting on the excellence of the wheat and the powerful build of the tribe of people who inhabit the town of Marh says, "their women are exceedingly beautiful and famous for their charms in intercourse and the amount of pleasure that they give" (Ibn Battuta 1994:785). A few weeks later he makes this observation in Daulatabad: "The inhabitants of Daulatabad belong to the tribe of the Maratha, whose women God has endowed with special beauty, particularly in their noses and eyebrows. They have in intercourse a deliciousness and a knowledge of erotic movements beyond that of other women" (Ibn Battuta 1994:794). As he set out to China, he requested that he be assigned a set of cabins on board to accommodate the slave girls without whom he never traveled (1994:814). Abdur Razzak is clear when he lands in Calicut and "sees the blacks of this country" that "I could never fall in love with a Negress" (Razzak in Major 1857:16-17). However, as he travels to Belur, he is impressed with the houses that were like palaces, and the women who reminded him of the beauty of the Houris (Houris are the celestial nymphs who are promised to every believer in Paradise) (Razzak in Major 1857:20). Razzak is unprepared for the magnificence of the kingdom of Vijaynagar, particularly of its prostitute quarters: "The magnificence of the places of this kind [houses of prostitution], the beauty of the young girls collected therein, their allurements, and their coquetry, surpass all description. … Each of these women is bedecked with pearls and gems of great value, and is dressed in costly raiment. They are all extremely young, and of perfect beauty. Each of them has by her two young slaves, who give the signal of pleasure, and have the charge of attending to everything which can contribute to amusement. Any man may enter into this locality, and select any girl that pleases him, and take his pleasure with her" (Razzak in Major 1857:29). Such descriptions remind one of latter-day adventurers like Richard Burton (Razzak in Major

1857:29). Nicolo Conti, accompanied by his wife and four children, is the only one who does not comment on his own experiences, saying merely that "Public women are everywhere to be had, residing in particular houses of their own in all parts of the cities, who attract the men by sweet perfumes and ointments, by their blandishments, beauty, and youth; for the Indians are much addicted to licentiousness" (Conti in Major 1857:23). Nikitin shares with his readers this piece of hard-won knowledge: "In the land of India it is the custom for foreign traders to stop at inns; there the food is cooked for the guests by the landlady, who also makes the bed and sleeps with the stranger. Women that know you willingly concede their favors, for they like white men" (Nikitin in Major 1857:10).

What is one to make of such material in these narratives? Are these men offering accounts of sexual adventures as compensation for the risks of travel? Are they celebrating their cosmopolitan ability to experience other cultures through their women? Even if the dominant motif here is not that of sexual conquest, but sexual adventure, why does it occupy such an important place in the narratives? And why does one never find the hint of homoerotic longing that was such a celebrated form of romance and yearning in the Mediterranean world of which they were a part, and of which one finds such a striking example in the *Baburnama*?[4]

Finally, what of the many merchants who made their homes in the Malabar, and who married local women and had families with them. One thinks again of Ben Yiju, who lived in Mangalore for eighteen years, married a local woman and had children with her (Ghosh 1993:226-230). What kind of cosmopolitanism does one attribute to those whose intimate knowledge of another way of being extends to that of being a husband or a lover?

Ben Yiju's case, of course, brings to the fore the question of conversion, which is particularly problematic in the case of religious conversion. In the anthropological literature, this is the fear of "going native." Such a conversion has the dual danger of not being true and heartfelt, in which case it becomes another form of exploitation perpetrated by a shallow and dilettantish outsider, or of being genuine and serious, in

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[4] The memoirs of Babur, the founder of the Moghul Empire.

which case it becomes a form of betrayal to the moral codes and community of professional anthropologists.

Nicolo de' Conti is an interesting case in this regard. On his return from China, he reached Cairo where he was forced to convert to Islam to save his life and that of his wife and children. Nevertheless, he lost his wife and two children to illness, and when he returned to Venice in 1444, after an absence of twenty-five years, he sought absolution from the Pope. The Pope granted his petition, asking him as penance to recount his adventures to Poggio Bracciolini, the Pope's secretary (Major 1857:lx). Nicolo's case is interesting because his "conversion" happens by degrees: first linguistic, then in terms of dress, and finally his religion. We learn from his memoirs that he learnt Arabic as a young man while residing in Damascus. Thereafter, he lived in Persia, learnt the Persian language, and then he adopted the dress of the country, "which he continued to wear during the whole period of his travels" (Conti in Major 1857:4-5).

The Russian traveller Athanasius Nikitin presents in his text how he was saved from conversion to Islam by the intercession of a Muslim from Khorasan. The ruler of Junnar seized Nikitin's horse, promising to give it back to him along with a thousand pieces of gold if he converted to Islam. If he did not convert, the ruler would keep the horse and offer a thousand pieces of gold as reward for Nikitin's head. He was given four days to decide. When Khoja Muhammed of Khorasan came into town, Nikitin pleaded with him to deliver him from conversion, and his prayers were answered. However, it appears that later on, Nikitin did in fact convert to Islam during his time in India, a fact that was obscured in the translation published by the Hakluyt Society (Scott 2001:132-133). Nikitin's conversion became a problem of translation in the text as all the references to Allah are then translated either into God or left obscure with original Turkish, Persian, Arabic or Indian words (Scott 2001:137).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to reflect on what cosmopolitanism might mean in a very different era of globalisation than the present. Although cosmopolitanism, as an expansive and sociable vision, is often contrasted with the geographically limited perspective and claustrophobic affinities of nationalism, I showed that the term originates in a historical period *before* the rise of nationalism in Europe. That it is today

so closely indexed to nationalism as an oppositional identity is the outcome of its nineteenth century usage. Thus scholars who use cosmopolitanism as an antonym of nationalism [cosmopolitanism versus nationalism] are not wrong because they are in fact echoing its dominant or hegemonic meaning.

Although the critique of nineteenth century cosmopolitanism revolved around its failure to engage with politics on the ground, I argue that it did indeed have a visionary and utopian politics that could not perhaps be fully articulated in the heydey of nationalism. At its worst, cosmopolitanism no doubt represented a dilettantish and perhaps selfish rejection of any form of affiliation, or a superficial celebration of hedonist difference. But we could easily overlook that, at its best, cosmopolitanism carried out a powerful indictment of the the systematic violence inherent in nationalism even when it did not fully articulate an alternative social order.

The analytical direction taken by recent studies of cosmopolitanism have tended to undermine the *opposition* between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, and to pluralise the term through ideas such as "discrepant" and "critical" cosmopolitanisms. A cosmopolitan history of cosmopolitanism, however, might make us see that cosmopolitanism is better opposed to "the vernacular" rather than the nation-state. In such a view, the nation-state is merely one, perhaps the latest, historical example of vernacularisation.

I have argued that the residents of the civilisations around the Indian Ocean in the medieval and early modern world (these categories are themselves problematical) were cosmopolitan even by the standards of the high modernist meaning of the term. Not only did a range of people transact and translate across different languages, but they also knew how to conduct themselves in different cultural settings with people of different religious beliefs, while respecting the disparate religious, social and cultural practices of their neighbors. This was a form of cosmopolitanism that did not assume that equality and even intimacy in social relations assumed or required commensurability.

However, this was by no means a cosmopolitan utopia. Some differences were harder to overcome than others and sometimes the encounters across lines of difference were

awkward, ridden with misunderstanding and, in extreme cases, violence. Inter-religious warfare between Christians and Muslims contributed to misunderstanding and misrecognition. In this light, it is particularly interesting to see how both Muslim and Christian travellers and merchants arrived at an understanding of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religious practices, for these were the dominant religions that they encountered in Hindustan.

In those cases when the negotiation of cultural difference resulted in conversion, the problem faced by the traveller was one of fitting back into the societies and cultures to which they returned, which constituted their own vernaculars as compared to the cosmopolitanism of community formed around the Indian Ocean. Some, of course, never did return, preferring to stay in places where they made fortunes, or developed conjugal and familial relations.

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