

# INTRODUCTION. MECHANISMS OF GLOBAL EMPIRE BUILDING

AMÉLIA POLÓNIA\*  
CÁTIA ANTUNES\*\*

This book maps out the crucial mechanisms of global empire building during the Early Modern period and poses at center stage global exchanges between-, across and among individuals and empires<sup>1</sup>. For the merit of this introduction, it is important to first address the definition of global empire, since this remains an elusive and challenging concept. Intuitively, global empire translates the hope and the will of a particular political system (usually regarded as metropolitan) to rule over an indefinite number of territories and govern a multitude of peoples, often in discontinued regions and in different parts of the world. However, few empires encompassed meaningful territorial domains or were able to absolutely govern over peoples across different continents. In truth, the illusion of trans-continental sovereignty is not enough to define an empire as global, although territorial expansion by individuals could be used by metropolitan authorities to claim and solidify the boundaries of empire, as Tamar Herzog has masterly shown in her latest work<sup>2</sup>.

For the editors of this volume, an empire results from a nominal political claim over a territory over which a certain state, or its delegated institutions (governorships, companies, towns, settlements, etc.), arguably hold domain. The editors find, however, a distinction between *imperium* and *dominium*. The former introduces the element of controlling

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\* University of Porto/CITCEM.

\*\* Leiden University.

<sup>1</sup> ANTUNES & POLÓNIA, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> HERZOG, 2015.

territories and institutions, while the later refers to the control of people, frequently using the former institutions and powers in place. For many centuries, these concepts remained separate, but under the Roman imperial government of Julius Cesar and Augustus, they were united in what was to become the *Imperium Romanum*<sup>3</sup>. Since then, empires were considered a combination of territorial control and human jurisdiction and both concepts became interchangeable. However, when looking at the Early Modern period, it becomes clear a substantial difference between the territory that central states thought to control and what they actually did control, being most Early Modern imperial borders porous and difficult to enforce<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, the domain over the peoples that populated the aforementioned territory was as illusory. The state and its institutions faced serious challenges to the enforcement of its dominions, challenges that met with responses ranging from genuine negotiation to outright violence<sup>5</sup>.

This book claims that it is so not only because of its lack of territorial coverage or control that «national» global empires do not exist, but rather because of their (in)capacity to accommodate the challenges imposed by autochthonous, sedentary, migratory or mobile populations, made of subjects and foreigners. It further claims that sometimes the domain, rather than formal, is informal and self-organized, as it happens, for instance, in much of the fringes of the Portuguese State of India. In these circumstances, it is in the domain of the human agency that historians may zoom into the mechanisms that made empires global, as these mechanisms were directly dependent upon the action of individuals, groups and networks in their enactment of empire<sup>6</sup>. The result of this agency was twofold. On the one hand, local agency often resulted in the increase of nominally controlled territories by the central state, a welcome result in view of the general weakness and limitation presented by central and local state institutions. On the other hand, it fostered personal and collective relationships across borders imposed by territorial definitions, making cross-imperial connections a matter of fact, rather than a matter of contingency. As a result of these cross-imperial connections and concomitant exchanges, formal frontiers of empires became less important for daily life, but ever so important for framing the lives of individuals, either through institutions or socio-economic and cultural systems<sup>7</sup>.

How did people connect across empires and what happened to empires as a result? The chapters in this book focus on instances in which individuals or groups systematically looked for ways to connect beyond the territorial and institutional limitations imposed by their respective empires. In so doing, they showcase a set of clear mechanisms of individual and collective agency that challenged, cooperated or represented imperial interests, in what

<sup>3</sup> LINTOTT, 1981: 28.

<sup>4</sup> HERZOG, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Violence is meant here as the overall encompassing notion of forcing one's social system upon another. This includes, among others, acts of war, exploitation, acculturation, cultural orthodoxy expansion (including religious and social regimes).

<sup>6</sup> WARD, 2008; HANCOCK, 2009; LAMIKIZ, 2013; POLÓNIA, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> ANTUNES, 2012: 172-184.

should be perceived as a sliding scale of behaviors, rather than an absolute stance designed in time and space<sup>8</sup>.

There are well known ways for people to connect beyond the territorial and sociological border of empire: illegal exchanges, marriages or trade were just some of them<sup>9</sup>. People married across ethnic and religious boundaries as much as they used trade in products or in systems prohibited by the central state or its institutions. Curiously, these illegal activities were not necessarily more common among autochthonous or sedentary population in the colonies than among mobile groups and temporary employees of the state institutions. Researchers, led by these new approaches, face several challenges, which are to become very productive, and revert into new research questions. This book aims at answering some of these questions by presenting several case studies within the scope of diverse imperial domains.

How did individual and collective agency contribute to the constitution of global maritime empires during the Early Modern period? This book will answer this question by looking at the role individuals played in the construction of “informal empires”, resulting from the enactment of a multitude of self-organized networks operating world-wide, whose main goal was safeguarding their personal social and economic advantages, frequently regardless of (and in spite of) state intervention.

Individual agents, their families and networks operated in the Atlantic or Asia, across geographical borders between empires, went beyond the restrictions imposed by religious differences, ethnic diversity or the political interests of central states. The result is the constitution of «informal empires». These informal empires were, we hypothesize, a borderless, self-organized, often cross-cultural, multi-ethnic, pluri-national world that can only be characterized as global.

In order to address this complex problem, the actions of agents or networks will be analyzed by considering the three processes by which free agents either defy or cooperate with central states. In fact, either they could use illegality (contraband, smuggling, privatizing); defiance (personal alliances with competitors of a given monopoly/central state); or litigation (suing the monopolies). They could adopt a cooperative approach by owning shares in the monopolies, working as subcontractors for the monopoly holders or by using lobby clusters to advocate for their interests at different levels of government, including, of course, lobbying the monopolies themselves. Lastly, agents could assume an appropriative/representative role by working within the monopolies and, thereby, serving the central state in the administration, the army or the evangelization process.

In this sense, we hypothesized that empires were brought to fruition also (if not foremost) by individual choices of individuals and the networks they created. This book con-

<sup>8</sup> We are grateful for the concept of «sliding scale» introduced by Erik Odegard and Kaarle Wirta, while developing their dissertations at Leiden University.

<sup>9</sup> NIERSTRASZ, 2015; NIERSTRASZ, 2012; NIERSTRASZ, 2016; POLÓNIA & CAPELÃO, forthcoming.

tributes to the discussion of this hypothesis by looking at the internal organization of individual agency within self-organized networks. By sustaining that between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries the world was increasingly characterized by widespread collaboration which went beyond the boundaries of countries and continents, this book seeks to look at the enactment of frequently multinational agents and networks during the Early Modern Period.

In the chapter *Sailors, Soldiers, Friars, Settlers: the Portuguese in North America in the 16th and 17th centuries*, Mariah Wade discusses how the Portuguese adventurers contributed and determined some of the outcomes of the Spanish presence in North America. In a different perspective so does Alejandro Garcia Monton. In his chapter *Protecting privileges, contesting exclusion: clashing transatlantic networks within and across 17th century empires*, he argues that the sustainability of the Spanish Empire depended on entrepreneurs, business groups and firms that were in fact foreigner and extraneous to the internal agency of Castile and the Spanish empire, in a curious combination of Italian, Portuguese, Dutch and British cooperation.

The internal mechanisms that enable cooperative networks to function at a global level are also under scrutiny here. Trust, reputation, kinship, self-regulation mechanisms, reward, coercion and punitive reciprocity are analyzed from a cross-border empire building perspective, with special emphasis for the merging of global networks of business and trade. The paper by Ana Sofia Ribeiro illustrates these relational factors when analyzing phenomena that sustained *Cooperative Rivalry: Iberian Merchants in Cross-Imperial Transactions in the Period of the Iberian Union (1580-1640)*.

Next to participative and cooperative, agency could also be reactive. Reaction was often of an economic nature. The creation of colonial monopolies and exclusive rights of access by the central states in the Early Modern period opened the way for Kate Ekama and Joris van den Tol's approaches on the mechanisms available to fight the system from within. Kate Ekama does so by analyzing *Conflict in Court: Suing the Dutch East and West India Companies*, while Joris van den Tol provides a chapter centered on *Public Discourse in the Dutch Republic on Free Trade to Brazil, ca. 1630-1638*, the later framed as means of lobbying pro- and against monopolies and free trade.

Interesting are the cases in which agents perform as members of the system, as representatives of the formal empire, defectors if you will, providing nevertheless alternatives for the sustainability of the system and a strong contribution to the globality of empire. As formal monopolistic colonial systems often resulted into unprofitable ventures, as was the case of the Dutch Atlantic in the eighteenth century, or unable to effectively guarantee, by control and punishment, the desired monopolies, as it occurred in the Portuguese Empire, institutional agents engendered solutions and legitimating schemes that could be considered illegal, or evolved from an illegal status into legality. The chapters by Karwan Fatah-Black, on *Deflected colonial monopoly formation in the Dutch Atlantic*, and Erik Oder-

gard's, *On Free Agents and the Carriers of Colonial Governors* offer significant evidence for the Dutch case, while Maria Inês Guarda obtained the same results when looking into *The Angolan Slave Trade in the Early 18th. Century*. These three essays provide clear evidence to how evading rules set out by the empire was not always illegal, as it often offered ways for added sustainability of empires.

Last, but certainly not least, this book tries to understand a world created by mechanisms that involved smuggling and other illegal ways of allocating products and services to a global market. Transaction costs became cheaper and thus viable in places and at times when central states were unable to compete. Exceptional circumstances were those when war or other diplomatic conflict threaten the stability of the European or overseas markets. Chris Nierstrasz' paper, *Have Your Tea and Drink it Too: How Rogue Companies, Private Traders and Smugglers Popularized the Consumption of Tea in Western Europe (1700-1760)*, enlists some of the most creative market solutions, thus assessing the complexity of these schemes. These creative solutions were initiated and optimized by individuals and networks, frequently sanctioned, on the shadow, by official institutions.

This book is mostly based on case studies, resulting from research driven by recent theoretical and methodological approaches to colonial studies and the analysis of overseas empires in the First Global Age. These are not, however, exceptional cases, and for that reason should not be seen as systemic curiosities, anomalies or irregularities. They are also phenomena that are common to multiple empires and in diverse chronologies. This collective work provides evidence for the Portuguese, the Spanish and the Dutch empires. All give multiplied evidence of stateless mechanisms, depending on the agency of individuals that, neglected until very recently by colonial history, have been considered as irrelevant. Other publications testify in favor and consolidated a shift in the way empires are analyzed, now focusing on individuals and networks, and the way they become central elements of the process of empire building<sup>10</sup>. This is not equivalent to fore close on the role of states, formal powers and institutions as agents of empire building, but it rather hopes to stress the dialectic relationship between state, institutions, networks and individuals in the construction of global empires.

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<sup>10</sup> ANTUNES & POLÓNIA, 2016; ANTUNES, 2012: 172-184; ANTUNES & FATAH-BLACK, 2016; PETTIGREW, 2015: 487-501; POLÓNIA, 2012: 349-372; POLÓNIA, 2015: 215-235.

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