Imperium et Sacerdotium:
Universalism, Fragmentation, and New Medievalism

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Abstract

Contemporary international relations theory suffers from a stubborn reliance on the Westphalian notion of the state system. Theoretically, the sovereign state is the supreme political unit in world politics and is the only political unit with access to international decision making. Borders act as "hard shells," containing the subjects of the state in a demarcated territory for protection and governance. However, in the real world, globalization has led to the development of a myriad of transnational associations. Added to the complex of regional, international, and even supranational governing structures, these organizations and associations have created a web of interaction that works above, below, and across states. While skeptics question the political ramifications of globalization, it is without doubt that modern world politics is rife with non-state actors. Simultaneously, states suffer from increasing rates of internal disintegration. Every continent of the globe—except Antarctica, of course—has witnessed breakdowns and breakups of states along social, ethnic, and national lines. It seems then that world politics is experiencing, simultaneously, increasing interdependence fuelled by globalization, as well as significant rates of disintegration across the globe. In the meantime, states have yet to give up their position of primacy in world politics and remain the supreme political organization. Yet Westphalian notions of the state system cannot account for the introduction of so many political forces above, below, and across state boundaries. A new framework must be established that better explains the phenomenon of global connectedness, intrastate dissolution, and widespread faith in the state system.

This paper suggests new medievalism as a viable alternative. This framework, defined as "a system of overlapping authority and multiple loyalty, held together by a duality of competing universalistic claims," maintains the viability of the state system (*Imperium*) as a major component of world politics, yet also admits the increasingly political nature of the global market (*Sacerdotium*) as competing universal claims. Moreover, this competition leads to devolution from centralized authority and loyalty and accounts for the multiple sources of authority and foci of loyalty other than the state.

Introduction: The End of Westphalia

In international relations theory the state is considered the prime unit of political organization. While regions and other divisions may divide national authorities and responsibilities within, and international and transnational organizations attempt to coordinate or persuade from above, the state remains the locus of sovereign authority and loyalty. This design, known as the Westphalian system, supposedly did away with the confusion and disorderliness of the complex medieval system of feudal realms within ecclesiastical and imperial domains of Western Christendom.

However, as the adage goes, history repeats itself, and politics is certainly not immune. While Marx argued that history was the struggle between social classes,[1] it has also been a struggle at a higher, less direct level. The dichotomy of classes within societies is paralleled in world politics by the struggle between forces of cultural cosmopolitanism and distinctiveness, the latter of which usually manifests itself politically, while the former can manifest itself within other social facets, such as religion or economics. While most humans understand the value of universal interaction within humanity, they also do so to a certain extent so as to preserve whatever social, cultural, or other characterstic(s).

What, then, does this mean for the state? While states remain, in international relations, sovereign powers, on an individual level they compete with transnational interactions and associations of individuals as well as, especially in nationally- heterogeneous states, ethnic or cultural divisions, both of which can disturb the supposed absolute authority and loyalty of the state. These developments are clearly seen in the increasing width and depth of first economic, then social, cultural, and technological globalization, and the constant flow of stories of disintegrating and civil war-torn states.[2] This has led Jörg Friedrichs to develop what he called the "triple dilemma of current International Relations theory": economic and social globalization

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[1] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *Karl Marx* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 21.

[2] Benjamin Barber rightly covered the simultaneous rise in intensity of globalization and fragmentation in *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Random House, 1995): "anyone who reads the daily papers carefully, taking in the front page accounts of civil carnage as well as the business page stories on the mechanics of the information superhighway and the economics of communication mergers, anyone who turns deliberately to take in the whole 360-degree horizon," he wrote, "knows that our world and our lives are caught between what William Butler Yeats called the two eternities of race and soul: that of race reflecting the tribal past, and that of soul anticipating the cosmopolitan future," 3-4.

paradoxically coexist with ethnic and cultural fragmentation, while the state strives to maintain the political monopoly of authority.[3] The solution to this dilemma is a new model of world politics, one that breaks down what Hedley Bull called "the tyranny of existing concepts and practices" of IR theory and better represents the multiple layers and loci of loyalty and authority beyond the state: new medievalism.[4]

Defining 'New Medievalism

Medieval politics was more than just decentralized feudalism. Manorial lords (dukes, barons, earls, etc.) had significant autonomy over their local territories and populations of serfs and villagers, not to mention the service of a private armed force. However, the lord's power was exercised over a fief, granted to him by a higher lord, usually the king. This created a complex— and potentially confusing—system of hierarchy. Moreover, the complexity of nobility led to political divisions at multiple levels, which led to multiple allegiances for noble and commoner alike.

It was this complex arrangement that Arnold Wolfers described when he first coined and defined "new medievalism": a blurring of the line between domestic and foreign policy.[5] Later, Hedley Bull, a central IR theorist in the English School, contributed significantly to the development of the concept of new medievalism in his magnum opus, *The Anarchical Society*. Here he considered the possibility of "a secular reincarnation of the system of overlapping or segmented authority that characterized mediaeval Christendom" existing in the modern world.[6] Based on five criteria—regional integration of states, disintegration of states, the restoration of private international violence, transnational organizations (multinational corporations), and the technological unification of the world—he ultimately concluded that "If some of the trends towards a 'new medievalism'…were to go much further, such a situation might come about, but

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[3] Jörg Friedrichs, "The Meaning of New Medievalism," *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 4 (2001): 478.

[4] *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia UP, 1977), 267.

[5] *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1962), 241-242. Domestic policy refers to how a state exercises its internal sovereignty—controlling its territory, population, and activity within its borders. Foreign policy refers to how a state exercises its external sovereignty—relations with other states. Wolfers here was referring to situations where the line separating domestic and foreign policy may be blurry, such as an international arrangement that places restrictions on internal pollution rates (i.e., the Kyoto Accords) or accepting a Universal Declaration of Human Rights that applies to the individuals within each signatory state. These situations further reduce the primacy and challenge the authority of the state.

[6] Bull, *Anarchical Society*, 264.

it would be going beyond the evidence to conclude that 'groups other than the state' have made such inroads on the sovereignty of states that the states system is now giving way to this alternative."[7] Thirty years later, the trends he wrote of have gone much further, among others that started since, as will be discussed below.

Friedrichs provided a breakthrough development for new medievalism in his 2001 article, "The Meaning of New Medievalism." Medieval politics was a complex web of overlapping authorities and loyalties, but there was more to it than that. What Wolfers, Bull, and others before Friedrichs had left out was the most significant social characteristic of medieval Europe: Christianity. Politics did not stop at the level of kings; above them was pope, the sovereign of the Church and God's representative on earth, and the Holy Roman Emperor, his secular counterpart.[8] These two formed what Friedrichs called "a duality of competing universalistic claims"[9] whereby "in addition to the centrifugal forces [of fragmented politics] there was a strong countervailing tendency of ecclesiastical and secular universalism that generated a considerable degree of cohesiveness" despite the multiplicity of authority and loyalty.[10]

New Medievalism, therefore, is a complex system of overlapping authorities and loyalties held in check by competing universal claims. A key understanding here is that the concept itself allows for multiple and varied interpretations as to what authorities, loyalties, and even claims are included. It is not a rejection of the state as a significant player in world politics as some have suggested.[11] Moreover, it is important to note that new medievalism is not the rise of major empires or the re-advent of universal Christianity, or any faith. It also is not a socioeconomic critique, calling for a reestablishment of feudalism, monarchy, aristocracy, or any such

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[7] Ibid., 275.

[8] Since Charlemagne, Holy Roman Emperors were considered the defenders of the faith, the secular representation of the Church's terrestrial power. While the two often competed for political dominance, consider the mutual necessity: without the Empire, the Church lost much of its military and coercive ability; without the support of the Church, the Emperor would lose legitimacy as an anointed leader. See Robin Winks and Teofilo Ruiz, *Medieval Europe and the Modern World: From Late Antiquity to Modernity: 400-1500* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 134-135.

[9] "Meaning," 482.

[10] Ibid., 485.

[11] See Anne-Marie Slaughter, "The Real New World Order," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1997), 183-197. Specifically, she accused that "the new medievalists proclaim the end of the nation-state" (183); as will be seen below, this could not be further from the truth. In fact, if read closely, new medievalism supports the necessity of true *nation*-states, where the political unit corresponds with the national makeup of the society, as opposed to the abstract heterogeneous states that cover the map.

characteristic of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, it does not imply a cultural Dark Age, as John Rapley points out.[12]

Rather, new medievalism uses the basic characteristics of the global medieval order and uses them to look at today's global situation. Thus, this paper maintains the viability of the state system (*Imperium*) as a major component of world politics, yet also considers the increasingly political nature of the global market (*Sacerdotium*) as competing universal claims.[13] Moreover, this competition leads to devolution from centralized authority and loyalty and accounts for the multiple sources of authority and foci of loyalty other than the state.

Obviously, the key to new medievalism is showing the decline of the states system from the true model of world politics to one-half of the equation (*Imperium*, vis-à-vis *Sacerdotium*), as well as showing the political, and not just economic, social, or cultural implications of the global market. In terms of international relations theory, new medievalism regards the interaction of non-state political communities or forces, not just governmental institutions, which the state system neglects to do. New medievalism as a viable alternative to the triple dilemma of current IR theory through its inclusion of the duality of competing universalistic claims; therefore, it solves not only for the contradictory nature of simultaneous fragmentation and globalization (the duality proposed by Barber in *Jihad vs. McWorld*) but also the decline of the superiority of the state as a locus of authority and loyalty. In its broadest sense, the duality of competing universalistic claims comprises *Imperium et Sacerdotium*. This duality can be seen through several prevalent trends in world politics that are specific representations of the overall picture.

State versus National Identity

In a true nation-state, individual loyalty to his nation should coincide with the authority his state exercises upon him—by being French, for example, he is governed solely by France, since that is his nation's state. Increasingly, however, individuals are finding sources of authority and loci of loyalty beyond (or below) the state. This can be seen in at the subnational, international, and supranational levels.

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[12] "The new medievalism, it should be noted," he wrote, "is not always malignant or violent." "The New Middle Ages," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 3 (May/June 2006), 101.

[13] The terms *Imperium et Sacerdotium* are borrowed from Friedrichs, "Meaning," 488.

A nation-state requires a nationally homogeneous population. Throughout the Westphalian era, "peoples who identified themselves as nations sought their own states," continuing through the twentieth century.[14] In these cases, the state, including territory, was defined around the nation. However, in regions outside Europe, particular in Africa, states govern nationally heterogeneous territories, encompassing multiple nationalities, ethnicities, and even politically autonomous regions based on national claims. Bull argued that "out of the demands of the Welsh, the Basques, the Quebeçois, the Flemish and others, there may arise qualitative changes in the states system," which would lead to a neomedieval arrangement.[15] Friedrichs claimed that in the "contemporary world the hegemonic claim posed by the nation-state system does not hold anymore," particularly because so few nation-states exist. "Older conceptions of political order along ethnical, cultural, and religious lines begin to reemerge, particularly in the periphery but also in the Western world."[16] The failure of arbitrarily drawn borders throughout Africa, the Balkans, and other regions show the necessity of alignment between nations and states.

Aristotle wrote that the statesman "has to consider the size of the state, and whether it should consist of more than one nation or not."[17] However, given the rapid rate of globalization and the increased ease of travel, is it possible to draw lines around nations? In most all cases borders could be drawn around districts with majority populations, but probably not exclusive populations; Aristotle's choice no longer exists in much of the world. The breakdown of the heterogeneous state, as seen in eastern Europe and central Asia post Cold War, is not necessarily a reaffirmation of the state system, however, since many of those new states continue to suffer from ethnic conflict,[18] and so leaves the state "transfixed in an intermediate" condition.[19] This

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[14] Bruce Russett, Harvey Starr and David Kinsella. *World Politics*: *The Menu for Choice*. 7th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2004), 49.

[15] Bull, *Anarchical Society*, 266.

[16] "Meaning," 484.

[17] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1943), 129. (Book III, Ch. 3, ln. 32-34).

[18] Peace is still wary in the former Yugoslavia. Tribes dominate south-central Asia, vying for statewide power. The Ukraine suffers from constant tension between the ethnic Russians east of the Dnieper and ethnic Ukrainians in the west "who cherish their autonomy even as they confront ethnic rivals in Romania across the Dniester River to the west and in Hungary, Slovakia, and Belarus to the northwest," Barber wrote. This leaves the Ukraine in a precarious position where "not only is it in conflict with most of its neighbors, but it is also deeply divided from within." Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, 200.

[19] Bull, *Anarchical Society*, 267. If societies in this intermediate condition "were to advance far enough towards sovereign statehood both in terms of accepted doctrine and in terms of their command of force and human loyalties, to cast doubt upon the sovereignty of existing states, and yet at the same time were to stop short of claiming that

throws the precision of state-based loyalty and authority into flux along with the viability of the state. Globalization leads to mixed populations (what some have called citizens of the global society or consumers in *McWorld*) while ethnic claims for statehood, driven by human nature as well as IR theory, lead to either failed heterogeneous states or catastrophic splits across national lines as seen in Africa, the Balkans, and elsewhere.[20]

Even in (relatively) peaceful settings, however, individual identity still threatens the rationality of IR theory. Consider European citizenship, effectively written into the Maastricht treaty. This was achieved in practice by the development of individual rights under the EU framework that superseded national rights. "The most important right of EU citizens is to live and work in any of the 12 countries without restrictions that do not apply to citizens of those countries," which in effect added to the erosion of internal borders within the EU.[21] Add to the mix the EU's Committee of the Regions, "established in response to a growing demand for greater regional autonomy and a corresponding belief that, as regions grow in self-governing capacity, they too should have a voice in the EU," circumventing the state and adding to the ever-increasing supranational character of the Union.[22]

Including the vast and growing array of IGOs only widens and deepens the applications of this argument. While the UN itself has yet to consistently invoke its powers regarding individual rights, this is due only to its exclusive membership of only states: were the UN to establish its own Committee of the Regions, and offer it significant decision-making authority, perhaps the world body would be less hesitant about flexing its muscle. While states would

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same sovereignty for themselves," as has happened across Africa and even in parts of the West (the Basques in Spain and France, for example), "the situation might arise in which the institution of sovereignty itself might go into decline," ushering in a pre-Westphalian order of the medieval kind.

[20] For a well-studied argument on the inevitable conflict between state sovereignty and national sovereignty, see J. Samuel Barker and Bruce Cronin, "The State and the Nation: Changing Norms and the Rules of Sovereignty in International Relations," *International Organization* 48.1 (1994), 107-130.

[21] David M. Wood and Birol A. Yeşilada. *The Emerging European Union*. 3rd ed. (New York: Pearson, 2004), 74. For more on the Maastricht treaty see Wood and Yeşilada; Michael Maclay, *The European Union* (Phoenix Mill, Great Britain: Sutton, 1998), 79-88; William I. Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Anchor, 2003), 442-451.

[22] Wood and Yeşilada, *Emerging European Union*, 109. Tove H. Malloy, "National Minority 'Regions' in the Enlarged European Union: Mobilizing for Third Level Politics?" (working paper, European Center for Minority Issues, Flensburg, Denmark, July 2005) offers significant introduction and analysis of the European Union concept of "regions," while examining specific regions and their impact on EU decision making. (It is interesting to note that he establishes European regions as a third level of politics, along with the state and the international organization.) For some brief remarks on the Committee of the Regions, see also Gian Luigi Tosato, "The Vertical Distribution of Competences in the EU Draft Constitutional Text," *The International Spectator* 2 (2003), 51, 57.

suffer some loss of primacy, global governance would be best served by acknowledging the realities of current world politics. Moreover, NGOs—the global interest groups—might have more weight in such an institution, especially those that report on and fight against state-sanctioned oppression of minority ethnicities, once Bull's tyranny of state-primacy is overthrown. A neomedieval system of structuring the institutions of world politics would allow for such advancements.

The Politics of the Global Market

The previous section showed that as national identities become increasingly important in world politics, the state should lose primacy in global governance. The political effects of the global market, spurred by globalization, are taking a significant toll on the efficacy of maintaining the state system as well. Global capitalism has led to the development of not only a powerful economic-based regime for decision-making in world politics, but also a macroculture of consumerism.

Few political decisions are made without deep consideration of the financial and economic consequences. "Both the nation-state system and the world market economy are made up of competing entities with universal aspirations, namely states and corporations," Friedrichs wrote. "While nation-states are the principal actors in the modern states system, corporations constitute the transnational market economy."[23] Territory, population, and resources—traditionally considered the foundations of state sovereignty—are now hotly contested not only between states but also between corporations and between states and corporations. This breakdown of the world into two interconnected, competing realms presents an interesting situation for world politics. As economic matters such as movement of capital and labor fall out of the purview of states, they bring along with them political matters such as definitions of territorial boundaries, citizenship, and tax bases. This leads to two trends: fragmentation along socioeconomic lines rather than political ones, and economic universalism as states lose power and authority to clearly define their own national economic policies vis-à-vis global policy.

The real tragedy of the demise of the state via the rise of the global market is that not only do states permit this, in most cases, they promote it, even if unconsciously. This occurs in

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[23] Friedrichs, "Meaning," 488.

two ways. First, states adjust their economic policies so as to attract job-creating industries to their territory: "Because foreign and direct investors are increasingly able to use the threat to exit [the country] as a method to leverage beneficial tax and labor policies," Gelleny and McCoy argued, "government policy independence is held hostage to market forces if they wish to maintain a high level of investment."[24] As they point out, this leads to the proverbial "race to the bottom" as states bankrupt themselves financially and morally, selling sovereignty and capability for the economic benefits of giant firms. Suter declaimed that as states offer lower and lower tax rates, funds for services become more and more scarce, causing two problems for the state: first, it can no longer afford to provide basic services for its citizens, while, second, individuals become more loyal to the private companies and organizations that fill the service vacuum, as Rapley's account of his experience in Jamaica showed.[25] Lower taxes mean more pocket money for individuals and corporations; however, "while this extra money in the hands of individuals and corporations has helped to finance a vast consumer expansion over the past three decades or so, there also are shortages in essential services and infrastructure."[26] Compounding this problem is the political nature of the problem: "No politician in the English-speaking world will get elected on a ticket of 'vote for me and I will increase taxation.'"[27]

The second way states promote their own demise through economic policy is by attracting cheaper labor—usually in the form of illegal immigration—seeking jobs. In this case, rather than selling out and failing to provide basic services, some states that are regional cores attract immigrants seeking jobs and superior social services, as seen in the cases of Mexican immigration into the United States and East European immigration into Western Europe, particularly France and Germany. This leads to multiple problems: strains on domestic services of the host state, social discord and resentment between citizens and immigrants, and entanglement of domestic naturalization agencies and diplomatic relations with the immigrants'

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[24] Ronald D. Gelleny and Matthew McCoy. "Globalization and Government Policy Independence: The Issue of Taxation." *Political Research Quarterly* 54.3 (2001), 512.

[25] According to Rapley's study of "Kingston's gangland," there dons and kingpins maintain law and order, "complete with a holding cell fashioned from an old chicken coop and a street-corner court"; moreover, they "tax" local businesses and punish delinquent payers, using the revenue to fund a "rudimentary welfare safety net by helping locals with school fees, lunch money, and employment" ("The New Middle Ages," *Foreign Affairs* 85.3 [2006], 95).

[26] Keith Suter, *Global Order and Global Disorder: Globalization and the Nation-State* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 184.

[27] Ibid.

home state, to name a few. While the host state certainly does not aim to cause these problems by its own economic success, it does unwillingly place itself in a position to attract these challenges to its ability to control its territory and regulate its population and labor force.

This rise of the global economy as a considerable political challenge to states has taken its toll in the macropolitical sense as well in the microrealm of individual interaction. "Managers in transnational corporations, decision-makers at the IMF and IBRD, administrators at the WTO and OECD are all involved in a universal project of regulating human relationships through the impersonal principles of the market," Friedrichs argued.[28] Barber also declaimed that "the political domain is 'sovereign' to be sure," but "the usurping dominion of McWorld has, however, shifted sovereignty to the domain of global corporations and the world markets they control." The result of this shift of sovereignty away from the state, he argued, "is a kind of totalitarian coordination—in the Middle Ages it was theocratic; in this age of McWorld it is economistic."[29] The ability of the market to wrest loyalty from the state on a global level demands that sovereignty, then, should be defined and measured not in the theoretical application of state power, as current IR theory would have it, but in realistic terms that take forces beyond the state under consideration. New Medievalism would recognize states as powerful actors, but ones that must contend in a world system that includes other significant actors as well.

Back to the Future: The Potential of New Medievalism

"One reason why European integrationists are and such groups as the Quebecois and the Basques (let us call them 'disintegrationists') are drawn towards solutions which would result simply in the creation of new sovereign states is the tyranny of existing concepts and practices," Hedley Bull wrote. "The momentum of the states system sets up a circle (vicious or virtuous according to the point of view) within which movements for the creation of new political communities tend to be confined. Perhaps the time is ripe for the enunciation of new concepts of universal political organization which would show how Wales, the United Kingdom and the European Community could each have some world political status while none laid claim to

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[28] Friedrichs, "Meaning," 489.
[29] Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, 296. Note the connection Barber draws between the medieval Church and the modern market, almost exactly as Friedrichs does in his article.

exclusive sovereignty."[30] If the European Union continues to develop as it has—hampered only by the Euroskeptic-induced defeat of the draft constitution treaty last year—it could reach a supranational position held only by medieval empires.

Casting off the straitjacket of state-centric thought could also lead to more innovative methods of handling sub-Sahara Africa, Eastern Europe, and other parts of the world plagued by intrastate conflict, civil war, and ethnonationalist secession movements. Clearly in these places maintaining the *status quo* is futile, even at a systemic level. The state system is one of many Western inventions forces on these peoples, and to reconsider ancient structures and arrangements may not be the worst idea. Complete fragmentation should not be allowed, but prolonging the inevitable is pointless, foolish, and cruel.

Beyond its status as an ever-deepening IGO, the EU holds other promising potential models for a post-state, neomedieval world system. The example of the European Union's Committee of the Regions has already been offered as a potential method of handling intrastate tension, while the EU itself is a promising method to combat transnational problems. But the implications are far more than just political: the economic effects of understanding world politics beyond the sovereign state could lead to reforms in global trade, fiscal policy, and international aid that may be far more beneficial once the tyranny of the Westphalian system that Bull mentioned is overthrown. Instead of spending so much time considering inconsequential questions such as the status of state sovereignty, students of international relations, world politics, and global economics could devote more time to contemplating ideal arrangements and institutions for examining the global phenomena and solving the transnational problems that pervade the obsolete borders of the Westphalian system, adapting the state into an organization that fosters global cooperation rather than competition.

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[30] Bull, *Anarchical Society*, 267.

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