Introduction: New Forms of Political Organisation, Community, Sovereignty and Identity: Civil Wars, the New Diplomacy and International Relations

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Since 1989 the concept of 'civil war' has taken on new salience in international relations. Significant inquiries into inter-ethnic violence emphasising studies of political community, identity, sovereignty, and political organisation have dominated the study of civil war in the past decade. Processes of social denationalisation of national identity have become more prevalent in everyday politics. Following Charles Tilly, civil violence is the product of three main influencing factors: coercive, capitalist and capitalised coercive.[1] Tilly implies that inter-communal wars within existing national-state structures challenge received wisdom on the ways in which social scientists understand and study community, identity, sovereignty and organisation. This introduction argues that the world has returned to a system of neo-medievalism after the Cold War. Bull defines neo-medievalism as a system of 'overlapping authorities and criss-crossing loyalties' which eliminate the absolute authority claimed and exercised by sovereign states.[2]

Not only would this undo international society, but such a system would radically transform political life itself, returning it to something analogous to the medieval world: a lack of mutual recognition among entities, an absence of 'anarchy' in the Waltzian neo-realist sense,[3] and a more complex pattern of relationships to consider.

In order to understand modern forms of political organisation and cultures it is initially necessary to review more traditional forms to place the analysis in context. It was not until the eighteenth century that the term 'nation' came to be used as the expression for the then emerging dominant form of identity and political organisation in post-revolutionary France and the wider Europe. Generally speaking, in the literature on culture and identity, the nation comprises a shared culture, shared history, delimited

territory (a 'homeland') and common laws. Nations can be viewed as 'voluntaristic' (that is, based on man's 'will' to be part of the nation, shared cultural characteristics: loyalty; solidarity; identification) and/or forced – impelled from the outside by an external threat (that is, forced by coercion and fear to be part of the nation).[4]

Benedict Anderson, an anthropologist, argues that the nation is an imagined political community. Anderson labels sixteenth-century England as the first nation, with bonds of common 'national' interests solidified by the monarchy and the role of the landlord. Since the late eighteenth century the processes of homogenisation, standardisation, and the associated emergence of human rights after the American and French revolutions (and the accompanying values of liberty, equality and fraternity) have been accompanied by the transmission of core values via education, the printed word, and so forth. In contrast to the nation, the state refers to the political organisation of societies (with a distinct set of political institutions) that displays sovereignty both within geographic borders and in relation to other sovereign entities.[5]

The nation-state, in its modern form, is a sovereign entity that is normally dominated by a single predominant national culture. The nation-state is a mythical and intellectual construct with a highly persuasive and powerful political force. A world of nation-states implies an international system of pure sovereign states, relating to each other equally as equals. Nation and state combined creates an enormously compelling mixture of legitimacy and efficiency for governing elites and societies. The nation-state, in this view, has two big advantages.

First, the authority of elites, as a natural embodiment of the identity and will of the citizens, creates a firm base for legitimate government.

Second, in addition, peoples who are secure economically and culturally behind their own borders, can negotiate with each other fairly and amicably.

The modern nation-state can be represented as follows:

FIGURE 1

WILL + CULTURE + POLITY (state institutions) = THE INDUSTRIAL VARIANT OF THE NATION-STATE

However, what preceded the modern nation-state in Europe? Does this debate have any relevance for contemporary European identity formation and organisation? What we might term 'Western medieval Europe' lasted for about 1,000 years from the year 500 to about 1500, and was called *Respublica Christiana*. It was a universal society based on a joint structure

of religious authority (sacerdotium) and political authority (regnum) which gave at least minimal unity and cohesion to Europeans whatever their language and homeland. The people had a customary political loyalty to their immediate feudal superiors, and only a weak loyalty to the King (the 'state'). Instead, medieval Europeans had a strong obedience to the (Western) Church headed by the Pope.

The Thirty Years War (1618–48) was the last war where state or empire tried to impose/enlarge their empire to the rest of Europe in the name of *Respublica Christiana*.[6] After 1648 the language of international justification changed towards international diversity based on a secular society of sovereign states. At the end of the Thirty Years War, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) was signed. The *Westphalian International Society* was based on three principles: that the King is Emperor in his own realm; that the ruler determines the religion of his realm; and the balance of power, in order to prevent any hegemon from arising and dominating everybody else. Napoleon I of France was the first state leader to be subjected to the Westphalian model by a coalition of European powers, who formally assumed the status of great powers and proceeded to govern Europe by a Congress to prevent France establishing itself as a hegemonic power. Indeed, Napoleon I was the last leader to claim the title of Emperor, drawing on a heritage going back to Charlemagne and even further back to the Roman Caesars.

Ole Waever recently stated that Europe is harking back to its neo-medieval past with many and varied assorted centres of authority and power in a diffused international system.[7] The model often cited by way of analogy is the medieval city-state system of northern Italy. Florence, Milan, Venice and Rome all vied for power and sovereignty. However, at the same time, they also amicably traded with each other when not engaged in war. Here the work of Hedley Bull, in particular his seminal work *The Anarchical Society* (1977), is particularly prescient. As is stated above, Bull defines neo-medievalism as a system of 'overlapping authorities and criss-crossing loyalties' which eliminate the absolute authority claimed and exercised by sovereign states. Not only would this undo international society, but such a system would radically transform political life itself, returning it to something analogous to the medieval world: a lack of mutual recognition among entities, an absence of 'anarchy' in the Waltzian neo-realist sense, and a more complex pattern of relationships to consider. Traces of neo-medievalism can be seen in transnational organisations (both military and economic) which command some loyalty, terrorist groups which 'privatise' international violence, the regional integration and disintegration of states, and the spread of information technology. Bull thought, however, that as of

1977 – when he published the book – international society looked to be in reasonably good shape.[8]

However, what about the early years of the twenty-first century after the end of the Cold War? The technological unification of the world through the Internet and the integration of global financial markets (20 years ago a drop on the Asian markets would not have had a 'ripple effect' like it does today) seems to have constrained states; transnational corporations are much more in evidence and are much more powerful (China calls in Microsoft when it wants to modernise its telecommunications system, bypassing the US government entirely; WorldCom owns MCI, and Daimler-Benz owns Chrysler); European integration is much more pronounced, and states are breaking up and 'decentralising' (as welfare systems are dismantled, for instance) all over the world. Perhaps international society is passing away; perhaps the state system itself is passing away.[9]

Bull does not really give clear standards for evaluating this question, but we can derive one from Gelber's[10] discussion of sovereignty, and the distinction advanced between 'authority' and 'control'. Bull's notion of international society is, ultimately, about authority rather than control; authority becomes a resource which various people and groups of people can use in achieving their aims. This means that 'the sovereign territorial state' is primarily a focus for loyalties, a way of organising politics, and is not simply reducible to its effectiveness in controlling things. If states are simply more constrained, then international society is still operative; if states are having to actually compete with other entities for loyalty and legitimacy, then things are moving in a different direction and there would be a change of world order.[11]

Berzins and Cullen explore a prominent strand of thought in the post-9/11 literature to date that emphasises changing features of contemporary international relations (IR) – and which can be loosely grouped under the term 'neo-medievalism'. Neo-medievalism is not conceived as a coherent theory in and of itself, but rather as a set of challenges to existing state-centric theories of IR, including: the rise of non-state violence, state disintegration, the spread of modern technology, and the rise of sub- and supra-state forms of identity – all of which serve to call into question the political authority of states and their continuing monopoly on legitimate violence. In their contribution the authors test the theory of neo-medievalism against the events of September 11 to arrive at their conclusion that the concept challenges existing state-centric theories of IR.

Gow and Bellou focus on the role of leadership in international politics and how this relates to civil wars. They argue that the greater the degree of

legitimacy, the greater the prospects for success – and, contingently, where legitimacy is challenged, the leader will be obliged to take action actively to restore its image. Gow and Bellou show that this was the case throughout the Cold War, with the United States (US) always in the role of leader, but that the dynamic was only revealed by the less static post-Cold War environment, as well as demonstrating the way in which the interaction of these two factors has determined intervention and engagement with the challenges and threats since 1990. Later sections of this study will show how the US leadership image, and its legitimacy in relevant affective and political environments, drove relations within the Euro-Atlantic community regarding intervention in the former Yugoslavia, the Gulf conflict of 1990 onwards and the post-September 11 campaign over Afghanistan, and a period of international deliberation and discourse regarding further prospective action over Iraq.

Simms' essay challenges recent reviews of his influential book *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia*. The intense interest generated by *Unfinest Hour* in the former Yugoslavia, particularly Bosnia was not remarkable. The unusually extensive coverage by the British media, however, is more surprising. It is partly explained by the current concern with Afghanistan, Iraq and the wider 'war on terror'. But the numerous and largely positive reviews in major national broadsheets showed that the book was also received in its own right as a contribution to the contemporary history of British foreign policy.

The resulting debate was characterised by widespread acceptance of the book's central theses: that the war was not simply a three-sided quagmire, but essentially a Serbian war of aggression waged by externally supported proxies; that British official sources tried to head off demands for military intervention by suggesting a rough moral equivalence between aggressor and victim; that this equivalence was reinforced by a rhetoric of 'warring factions', which failed to distinguish between rebel Serb – and later Croat – perpetrators and their victim, the internationally recognised government of Bosnia-Herzegovina; that the 'orientalist' mindset of much of the military profoundly affected perceptions on the ground; that Britain – even more so than France – systematically blocked all attempts to support the Bosnian government through the lifting of the arms embargo and the use of air power; that British experts persistently exaggerated Bosnian Serb military capabilities, and under-estimated those of the Bosnians and Croats; that the British government sought to 'humanitarianise' what was essentially a political and strategic problem; that disagreements over Bosnia led to the most serious transatlantic rift with the United States since the Suez Crisis in 1956; and that all this was intellectually driven by a profound 'conservative

realism' which was intensely sceptical of the morality, legality and practicality of military intervention.

Virchow points out in his analysis that the NATO-led war in Kosovo against Yugoslavia in 1999 saw the first active participation of the German Federal Armed Forces in a military conflict. Prior to 1999, the German Federal Armed Forces mission had been restricted to logistics, reconnaissance flights, medical support, and the control of embargos. The decision to dispatch fighting troops to the Balkans was accompanied by controversial debates about the legality and moral legitimacy of the war, and about the political consequences or alternative approaches to solve the conflict. The extreme right in Germany dealt intensively with the war, and the participation of German troops in it. This is not surprising as long as one keeps in mind that the far right, especially in Germany, holds the doctrine of 'soldiership' and military tradition in high esteem, and locates the idea of struggle and violence at the very core of its ideology.

For most observers, it was astonishing therefore that (the vast majority of) the far right in Germany polemicised heavily against the war, and against the participation of the German Bundeswehr in particular. Members of the far right Deutschland-Bewegung, led by the former army colonel Alfred Mechtersheimer, took part in anti-war demonstrations The Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) also demonstrated against the war. Members of violent neo-Nazi groups even staged a demonstration in front of NATO Headquarters in May 1999, when the Atlantic alliance celebrated its 50th anniversary. Analysing a broad range of publications of the far right in Germany, and some 100 articles published in 1999 and 2000, Virchow's essay gives a clear picture of the fundamental categories that the far right in Germany deployed in explaining the development of the war in Kosovo, and their opposition to it. The most central categories are race/racial nationalism, space/territory, and sovereignty/'Großraum'. These categories are seen as the most important factors that not only serve as a basis for this case, but also in determining the global order in international relations generally.

Olsen's contribution argues that the situation in large parts of sub-Saharan Africa resembles what Hedley Bull describes as 'neo-medievalism'. It is the basic argument of Olsen that the general weakening of the state system in Africa, combined with the increasing 'privatisation' of Africa's external relations, question if the traditional government-to-government system between Africa and the European Union is still an adequate framework to use when addressing the challenges from neo-medievalism. Based on an analysis of the European Union's policy responses to the many conflicts, to the increasing use of mercenaries, and to

the trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings, the study concludes that the biggest obstacles to developing common European Union (EU) policies towards the African 'neo-medievalism', are the narrow national interests of the European states combined with their lack of interest in the region.

Norrell's essay states that since the 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam' (LTTE) took up arms to fight for an independent homeland in the north and north-east parts of Sri Lanka in 1983, tens of thousands of people have been killed, wounded or driven from their homes. At the beginning of the millennium, new peace initiatives have surfaced with Norway emerging as a major external player. After nearly 20 years of vicious civil warfare the case of Sri Lanka is an example of a kind of inter-communal, 'neo-medieval' (within existing nation-states) war that Hedley Bull defines as a system of 'overlapping authorities and criss-crossing loyalties'. This is an example of an episode that eliminates the absolute authority of the sovereign state (and especially its monopoly of using violence through police and military forces), and instead heralds an international system where the mutual recognition between states is replaced, or at least challenged, by non-state actors.

NOTES

1. Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1990* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990).
2. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan 1977).
3. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley 1979).
4. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1983), p.1.
5. F. H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986).
6. Erik Ringmar, *Identity, Interests and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1996) p.3.
7. Ole Waever, 'Imperial Metaphors: Emerging European Analogies to Pre-Nation State Imperial Systems', in O. Tunander, P. Baev and V.I. Einagel (eds.) *Geopolitics in Post-Wall Europe: Security, Territory, and Identity* (London: Sage 1997) pp.9–93.
8. Paul Hurst, 'Politics: Territorial or Non-Territorial', <www.theglobalwebsite.ac.uk/press/104.hirst,2001>.
9. LSE, Global Civil Society Programme, at www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Civil Society.htm, see especially the section on 'New Wars and Global Civil Society.
10. Lionel Gelber *Crisis in the West: American Leadership and the Global Balance* (NY: St Martin's Press 1975).
11. Bull (note 2), Chapter 1.