

# **Empire and International Systems: Towards a Comparative Typology (of the European Experience)**

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## I. Introduction: Is Systems Theory Dead?

For more almost three decades international relations scholarship has challenged the penchant for deductive systems theorizing by structural realists that came at the cost of empirically informed understanding. The structural realist view of course was most eloquently expounded in the interpretation of international relations by Ken Waltz (Waltz 1979).

The key tenets hardly need restating. Basing his argument on a particular interpretation of Durkheim and drawing on analogies with market economics, Waltz postulated that two features gave structure to the international system: Anarchy and the distribution of power within the system. Anarchy was a historical constant and thus the distribution of power remained as the only salient variable. Imperial or hegemonic systems resembled the monopolist position in the market; multipolar worlds of several great powers resembled oligopolies; and a world of many competing, equivalent polities resembled the pure competitive market. This logic applied cross historically, and thus, for example, Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian war could be perfectly understood in this framework (Gilpin 1981). Waltz explicitly asserted the homogeneity in international relations across time.

The sparse, but powerful rendition of Waltz seemed to nicely convey the structure of the international system, particularly during the Cold War decades. It lent itself to clear predictions regarding the stability of a bipolar system versus a multipolar system and sparked a substantial and fruitful research program (Gilpin 1986; Keohane 1986).

Subsequently, armies of historical sociologists and political scientists took structural realism to task for its a-historicity, its methodological underpinnings, its particular interpretation of Durkheim, and other reasons (see, for example, Ashley 1986; Ruggie 1986; Spruyt 1994).

Following this critical examination of structural realism, interesting work has started to emerge in the description of various types of systems. By opening up the analysis of such systems across time and across geographic space, scholars have started to re-examine how non-European systems--Mesopotamia, Meso-America and many others--might have structured their inter-polity relations (Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993; Ferguson and Mansbach 1996; Mann 1986).

But such analyses run another risk. While they add greatly to our empirical knowledge of disparate systems, they sacrifice the ability to generalize. Structural realism's empirical paucity was replaced by

detailed empirical narratives.

This paper aims to start a discussion on how one might reduce this seemingly infinite variation of international systems, unit types and patterns of governance within those systems, to some essential characteristics along which these various systems might be compared. More specifically, I propose to develop deductive criteria along which such systems might be typologized. I propose four features that might serve to organize this universe of cases. First, systems may be differentiated by the discreteness of the units composing the system. I will argue that the commonly used differentiation of systems by the power differentials in the system is useful but contingent on whether such units bundle the social sources of power, that is, whether they are discrete organizational entities. Thus, secondly, systems can be distinguished by the number of major powers in a system. But whether or not one can meaningfully deploy this as an analytic concept depends on whether or not the units in the system are discrete from one another or whether there are overlapping claims of authority in different spheres. Third, systems differ in their degree of hierarchy. Fourth, systems can be typologized by the degree of dynamic density within the system and with other systems (Durkheim 1933).

In the following I first lay out a rationale for using these specific criteria to distinguish among various systems. I then apply the

characteristics mentioned above to five different types of systems. Admittedly this remains largely a Eurocentric exercise but non-European examples of similar systems can be readily found. I do not claim this as a comprehensive list. The aim is rather to see if such a deductive set of criteria might be a useful ordering device of historically informed typologies not only for the European case but of non-European systems as well.

## II. Towards a Typology of International Systems

### A. Discreteness

Systems vary by the discreteness of the units composing the system. To what extent do they bundle the resources of social power within their boundaries? Or to what extent are such resources distributed and contested among various centers of power with overarching and cross cutting claims?

The assumption that units in international politics are per definition discrete drew criticism by John Ruggie (1986) and others (Spruyt 1994; Holzgrefe 1989.). As these authors pointed out structural realism assumes that units are completely separate and unconnected from any degree of hierarchical governance. Thus, as an analytic statement, one may correctly argue that discrete units act as strategic choice theory might predict. But as a synthetic statement, it

is surely false. Discreteness of political units is a specific historical phenomenon, an ideal-typical rule of the modern state system, but it is not a trans-historical given. The same is true for anarchy.

Michael Mann's macro-historical approach offers one way of categorizing the extent to which political communities can mobilize and bundle the various sources of power within that community (Mann 1986). Mann distinguishes four sources of social power: cultural, military, political, and economic. "A general account of societies, their structure, and their history can best be given in terms of the interrelations" of these four sources (Mann 1986, 2). He then goes on to develop, in a yet to be completed multi-volume work, a description of a wide range of historical cases from ancient times to the present and across distinct geographic areas.

Mann's many distinctions between levels and dimensions of society, the degree to which power may be extensive or intensive, the variation in which power may be yielded authoritatively or whether it is diffuse, etc., leaves one wanting for a sparser typological classification. Mann's many gradations allows one to pay heed to the immense variation of social and political organization but the descriptions of various forms of authority across history, remain unique configurations. Each combination of certain forms of power remains *sui generis*.

Instead I propose to use his fourfold differentiation of power resources to distinguish between political structures. Some polities, most notably the nation-state in the modern era, have succeeded to a remarkable degree in bundling these resources. In many other instances, authority has been dispersed across actors who overlap and contest each other's sphere of jurisdiction. The village chieftain thus rules side by side with the shaman, sometimes delineating respective spheres of operation, sometimes clashing. Emperor and Pope similarly vied for supremacy in Europe.

## B. Polarity

Structural realism creates a typology based on 4 types of system: Hierarchical Systems and Anarchical Systems. The latter in turn can be subdivided in unipolar, bi-polar and multipolar varieties. Conversely, others (Lake 1999, Nexon and Wright 2007, Cooley and Spruyt 2008) suggest that there are many other varieties that operate between the extremes of anarchy and hierarchy.

But these typologies all assume that polities are discrete. That is, that one can readily distinguish different authority structures, as distinct political units. This, however, is far less clear in situations where individuals are beholden to various authorities that hold claims to rule in distinct spheres, and over distinct geographic space. For

example, in the late Medieval period, individuals might be beholden to the local lords (secular and religious), the king, empire, and papacy, all at the same time, and all of which could lay claim to govern individuals in particular spheres. To make matters even more complex, these authorities could lay claim to possess multiple sources of power. Thus the papacy could claim not merely religious or cultural power resources but could tax and raise militaries of its own. In this highly complex environment, polarity becomes a highly contingent and virtually meaningless category. Hence, the question of polarity in turn hinges on the discreteness of political units. If actors are clearly differentiated and when they can bundle the various sources of social power, polarity forms another component of architecture. (However, as I will argue shortly, in order to function as such, polarity also assumes knowledge about the density of interaction among units.)

### C. Hierarchy.

Systems also show variation in the degree of hierarchy. To what extent are units within a system ordered horizontally, i.e. with equivalent juridical authority or are they ordered in some hierarchical fashion? (Lake 1999, Krasner 1999, Cooley and Spruyt forthcoming, Nexon 2007). Is hierarchy within this system only partial in that some (but not all) of the distinguishable units are subject to a higher

authority, as, for example, under hegemony (Gilpin 1981; Ikenberry 2001)? Indeed, if hierarchy is fully determinative of the behavior of the units in question, the very differentiation of units might disappear, as in an empire.

#### D. Dynamic Density

Finally, systems differ by the degree of interaction, the degree of dynamic density (Durkheim 1933) with other systems and within the system itself. Did the particular grouping of polities that formed part of an identifiable system interact with other polities within that system? Did they interact with and were their policies influenced by other actors that were parts of another system?

Waltz's interpretation of Durkheim's work remains peculiar. Waltz used a truncated reading of Durkheim to suggest that hierarchy governed specialization. Given a lack of hierarchy, units could not specialize, hence, the division of labor would be low and interactions would be marginal—solidarity would be mechanical not organic. But this reading is truncated in that Durkheim was interested in the very transformation from mechanical solidarity (pre-modern social organization) to organic solidarity (modern formations). There is no presumption of causal primacy. Thus the level of interaction might very well determine the degree of hierarchy in that social formation.

This dynamic element drops out of Waltz's interpretation. By contrast, Karl Deutsch used a Durkheimian framework to argue that higher degrees of dynamic density mitigated the consequences of anarchy, and indeed might lead to more hierarchy in the system. Units could form non-aggressive collectivities, even amalgamate.

Thus, the very level of dynamic density forms a typifying feature of the particular international system. Low levels of density will correlate with (not necessarily cause) low levels of hierarchical governance. The degree of density is an attribute of the system not a necessary and logical consequence of the pattern of hierarchy and anarchy.

This point might be understood intuitively by thinking of WW I. As a heuristic exercise one might wonder whether the European environment at that time proved unstable due to its multipolarity (5 powers-- Britain France, Austria, Russia, Germany; or 6 if one includes Italy) or due to its bi-polarity (due to the rigid alliances that formed in the wake of the 1892 alliance of France and Russia). This is a perfectly reasonable exercise, for structural realists, given that the relevant balance of power is the only feature that defines the architecture of the system at hand. Waltz merely posits that a system consists of a set of interacting elements, and leaves it at that. We know that the European states interacted with one another at a high degree, and

thus we can move on to analyzing the distribution of power and its consequences.

But one might well ask why these powers are the only ones to include. The U.S. was already by far the preponderant economic power. Japan was a significant military power, which had defeated Russia decisively and which precipitated Britain to seek an accord with Japan in the Orient. Yet, in explaining the outbreak of WW I we rarely include them as part of the relevant system. Why is not the relevant system to analyze one that includes non-European major or even greater powers?

The answer is that what constitutes the relevant system, and what constitutes the contours of that system, is defined by the level of interaction. The very architecture of the system hinges on how one classifies the degree of interaction between the various units. The U.S. had the economic means but not the military ambition to weigh in on the European continent. Japan similarly lacked the military means or will to try to exercise any influence on European affairs. Thus, as with discreteness among units, the question of polarity in a system presumes a particular assessment of the degree of interaction among the units in the system, and between actors of distinct systems. Consequently, in the following we will typify systems both by their intra-systemic relations and the level of inter-systemic interactions?

In the following I apply these characteristics to five different types of systems. As said, this is not a comprehensive list. Indeed, mathematically, the various permutations and combinations of these characteristics allows for a wider deductive typology of systems. The aim is rather to see if such a deductive set of criteria might be a useful ordering device of historically informed typologies.

### III. Singular Hierarchy, Single System:

#### Case: The Roman Empire

The Roman poet Virgil noted in his Aeneid that the gods had granted Rome “an empire without end.” And indeed, as other universal empires, the Romans saw the external world as one to be conquered. Of course there were material limits to whether the Roman Empire could actually do so. However, it recognized no moral or logical constraints to how far it should try to extend such authority. I had frontiers (limes) not mutually negotiated borders. “Caesar’s political plan, expressed in his Commentaries...not only represents his personal political thinking but the policy consensus in Rome—at least until Commodus: to conquer the world up to the ‘earth-surrounding ocean’.” (Kratowich 1986 36). There were thus no markers of where the boundaries of the empire lay (Elton 1996, 35).

As all pre-modern forms of organization the empire constituted a capstone polity (Gellner 1983; Crone 1989). While it eliminated the political autonomy and independence of conquered territories, its ability to reach deep into society and dictate religious affiliations and local customs remained limited by today's standards. As long as the subject populations recognized Rome's imperial might, Rome tolerated cultural and religious diversity.

But its abilities were considerable nevertheless. It bundled central authority by simultaneously annexing the subject polities, and extending the incentives for individuals to identify with the empire. Citizenship gradually expanded well beyond the Latin population to include the conquered tribes of Italy, and ultimately well beyond Italy itself (Doyle 1986, 93f). Dacians (Romanians), Spanish, and even a North African ascended to the imperial throne.

The empire bundled cultural, military, economic, and political resources. Culturally, emperor worship proclaimed the divine status of the emperor. The later Christian empire, after Constantine, altered the mode but not the intent of identifying imperial rule with a religiously sanctioned motif. Militarily, even if the army was dispersed over various frontiers, central control emanated (theoretically although not always in practice) from the dictates of the imperial capital. Economically, the reality of pre-modern production dictated that local

conditions and customs prevailed in largely agricultural practice. Yet, compared with earlier forms of government the empire had vastly extended the ability of government to affect intra-imperial economic affairs. Roman coinage facilitated trade. Infrastructural projects, as roads, aqueducts, bridges, served military purposes but also to integrate (in a modest sense) economic activity. Written codes further facilitated administrative rule as well as the beginnings of commercial enterprise in Europe. Politically, while allowing local customs to prevail, it negated the ability and the right of previously distinct polities to determine their fate. While it recognized various degrees of allies and associated states (foederati and allied kingdoms, see Elton 1996, ch.3) it denied sovereignty to the subject territories. Thus, although perhaps a capstone government, there was an overarching final authority structure.

Thus, the empire absorbed previously distinct polities into a new whole. Within this empire, the distinction of independent units had ceased to exist, and was replaced by hierarchical order.

Rome's interaction with polities or empires beyond the frontiers remained infrequent. Part of this was no doubt due to material impediments. Southward the desert limited Rome's extension in Africa. In North and Eastern Europe, lesser developed and poorly organized tribes had little to offer but hostility. Only in the Middle East did Rome

have incentives to interact with polities that through long distance trade might benefit the empire. But its universalistic view of empire, with others as rivals that had yet to be conquered, precluded any dense relations with these other polities.

To sum up, the empire had obliterated distinct spheres of authority and sought to bundle the various sources of power under its control. The order was, as the term suggests, imperial and hierarchical to the extreme. Any challenge to Rome's authority met with draconian measures. To paraphrase Tacitus, what the Romans called peace, others regarded as devastation. Contact with other empires and systems were modest. A modicum of luxury goods traded across frontiers, but otherwise the interactions were primarily military confrontations. The empire existed as a relatively self contained system, hierarchically ordered, without discrete units. Indeed, the empire was the system.

---Here Scheme 1. Singular Hierarchy----

Summary Characteristics:

1. Discreteness: Low. System is one polity. The center claims supremacy over all power resources but tolerates multiculturalism and degrees of local autonomy in so far they do not challenge this supremacy.
2. Unipolar

3. Hierarchical system: Authority emanates from the core, use of local intermediaries

4. a) Intra-systemic density: moderate between core and periphery; very low between peripheries.

b) Inter-systemic density: very low, sporadic.

### Behavioral propositions

H1. Lack of balancing behavior.

a) weak inter-systemic contact means that system cores do not balance against other cores

b) Intra systems density is low and hierarchy prevents peripheries from organizing collectively against core

H 2. Types of conflicts consist of occasional frontier clashes, and localized internal challenges of disaffected agents.

Empire as a principal uses local intermediaries or agents from the center creating P-Agent problems (see Nexon and Wright, 2007)

H3. Mobilizational capacity moderate

Semi autonomy of periphery corresponds with limited demands.

Other examples: prevalent of older empires (Chinese, Japan, etc.)

empire as localized world system. See Unger 1987, Crone 1989)

#### IV. Feudal Anarchy, Single System

##### Case: Post-Carolingian Feudalism. c. 850-1100.

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire, roughly by the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century, the burden of government fell to the institution that had paralleled the imperial administration: the Church. Indeed, the boundaries of the Roman imperial provinces became the boundaries of the bishoprics. Clergy thus stepped in to fulfill the functions of defense and governance of imperial bureaucracy. However, such rule was without a doubt localized. The trans-local aspects of imperial rule disappeared despite attempts to reinvigorate the empire (as for example in the efforts of the Byzantine emperors, as Justinianus in Italy). Mass migration and external incursions from beyond the older Roman limes, squashed any attempt to do so.

The Merovingians, followed by the Franks, arguably came closest to renewing the Roman Empire. In an attempt to resurrect the cultural linkage of political rule and religious authority, Charlemagne was crowned emperor in Rome on Christmas day. To further bolster his claims elaborate forgeries (the Constantine Donation) were constructed to make the new Frankish empire, the legitimate heir to the Roman imperial project (Tierney 1973). Economically an attempt

was made to reintroduce centralized coin. Militarily, the Franks conquered territories from the North of Spain to the Elbe River.

The lack of primogeniture was its undoing (Dunbabin 1985). Without a system of regularized inheritance, the successors to Charlemagne self destructed. With division of empire and resources the empire could not withstand internal and external challenges to Carolingian authority. Only several short decades later the empire had fallen and authority came to reside with local lords.

As in the immediate Post-Roman period, the post Carolingian era led to fragmented, dissipated patterns on governance. Local strongmen and clergy stepped in. The distinction of religious and secular rule is an anachronism for this period. Bishops were indistinguishable in practice from "secular" lords. Both exercised similar authority. Bishops would even go to battle, although with different types of weaponry.

The key in this system hinged on the ability of the local lord to provide defense on the spot. With the fall of the Carolingians, Europe became particularly vulnerable to incursions by Vikings, Magyars and Muslims (Bloch 1981; McNeill 1982). Their hit and run tactics required readily available forces rather than a distant imperial army. Social and political life thus came to hinge on the presence of the defensible fortification that could shelter the population in times of need.

This need for local defense coincided with breakthroughs in military technology that favored the mounted knight (White 1973, 1978). Cavalry warfare elevated the position of the lord to unprecedented heights. The *milites* usurped military authority as well as political, cultural, and economic sources of social power.

Without a trans-local actor as the empire or the church to challenge local lords, they could lay claim to cultural resources to bolster their power. The bishopric of Rome was nothing like the papal administration it was later to become. The papacy in the 10<sup>th</sup> century fell now to this Italian family of influence then to another. So far had the prestige of the papacy fallen that at one time a dead pope was exhumed and put on trial.

With clerical authority dispersed to local bishoprics and monastic orders, lords melded ecclesiastical and worldly functions alike. Similarly, churches employed laborers and military personnel, and engaged in economic activity. Aristocratic families moved in and out of religious functions. Indeed, the two realms were virtually impossible to distinguish. "Those who prayed," and "those who fought," had placed themselves in a caste like manner atop the idealized feudal order, in which they dominated "those who labored" (Duby 1978).

The economic realm likewise contracted. Trade was localized centering on the keep and market, and was often barter trade. Indeed,

the whole feudal system of reciprocal obligation: servile contributions in exchange for lordly protection, was based on in-kind transfer.

Peasants were bound to the land in a manner not always distinguishable from slavery (Cheyette 1975, Strayer 1965).

Finally, the political powers of jurisdiction, adjudication, and enforcement had fallen to the lord as well. The power of the ban meant that the lord exerted supreme authority over the commoners in his realm. The idea of a feudal pyramid with the king at the apex was of later origin, dating to the end of the feudal era proper (Heer 1961). True, lords were sometimes obliged to each other in complex relations of mutual bonds and oaths. But this was not a hierarchical form of organization but rather alliances of essentially independent and powerful lords. Even the king of France was no more than the duke of Paris in the first two centuries of his rule. "France" denoted the area around Paris, not more (Dunbabin 1985; Hallam 1980). Various lords also called themselves "king." Thus on occasion we encounter in the medieval texts mention of the King of Normandy, the King of Burgundy, and so on (Reynolds 1984)

In this highly localized system of distinct polities, interaction with the world outside Europe, or even Western Europe was sporadic. The lack of common coinage, the proliferation of weights and measures—all evidence of localized economy—obstructed any degree of long

distance commerce and exchange. Interaction meant military excursions across boundaries. The influence of the external world (the world beyond the European feudal system) was low.

To conclude, feudal Europe of the post-Carolingian period consisted of discrete lordly units which had usurped and concentrated the various sources of power. Local strongmen tried to bundle the cultural resources, military capabilities, land and capital (i.e. economic resources), and the powers of governance. Hierarchy had thus receded. The European system of this period was anarchical, with limited interaction with other polities beyond that order. Inter-systemic dynamic density between Europe and other polities, specifically the Muslim world, consisted largely of armed struggle. Even within the European system, intra-systemic density had receded from previous centuries.

---Here schema 2: Post Carolingian Feudalism---

#### Summary Characteristics:

1. Discreteness high. Local lords usurp military, economic, and other sources of power.
2. Extreme multi-polarity. (Hyper-polar?)
3. Anarchical
4. a) Intra systemic interaction low  
b) Inter-systemic interaction sporadic, very low.

## Behavioral propositions

H 1. Weak balancing behavior along structural realist expectations.

Dispersed authority and weak intra-systemic ties leads to ad-hoc balancing against powerful actors in the system. Large number of actors creates collective action problems.

Similarly, weak balancing against extra-systemic threats (e.g. vs. Vikings, Muslim, Magyar)

H2. Mobilizational capacity high but localized

Local lords usurp military, economic, political and cultural sources of social power but are geographically constrained.

Other examples: Chinese warring states? Pre-Tokugawa Japan?

## V. Contested Hierarchy, Single System transforming to Multi-System

Case: Early Modern Europe circa 1100-1500

Starting roughly in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, Europe experienced changes in both its economic and military milieu (North and Thomas 1973; Bean 1973; McNeill 1982). Some scholars tend to emphasize the impact of internal and external economic changes (Pirenne 1952, 1956; Duby 1974; Spruyt 1994.) They place the beginning of the end of feudalism slightly earlier than those emphasizing changes in the

military environment (Bean 1973; Tilly 1975, 1990). Leaving aside the issue of precedence, or which causal dynamic was the more salient, there is no doubt that military transformations and economic expansion both contributed to the demise of the local feudal system. Indeed, while the remnants of feudal lordship arguably only fully perished with the French Revolution, the seeds of its decline were sowed many centuries before that.

Several profound economic changes occurred in the wake of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Production increased due to several breakthroughs in agricultural technology. Three field plowing and crop rotation made their debut. Deep plowing also contributed to the opening up of new agricultural lands (Duby 1968; North and Thomas 1973). Long distance trade made a come back. Even if the Pirenne thesis (which argued that the Mediterranean routes had been closed due to Muslim dominance) has been contested (Havighurst 1976), the core of his argument that long distance commerce reappeared in this period has stood the test of time. The greatest immediate beneficiaries were the polities surrounding the Mediterranean (Lopez and Raymond 1967; Scammel 1981)

Combined, these economic changes meant that the tripartite division of society in clergy, lords, and peasants was now contested by the rise of urban dwellers—those who lived in the sub-burgh, outside

the stronghold of the lord—that is, by the rise of a nascent bourgeoisie. Literally thousands of towns emerged in this period (Hohenberg and Lees 1985; Verhulst 1989).

Their objective to displace lordly dominance and the feudal system has been discussed elsewhere (Anderson 1974a, 1974b; Lodge 1957; Rörig 1969; Spruyt 1994). Suffice it to say that the towns were a dynamic force, and amenable to seeking an alliance with political actors who could redress the excesses of lordly control (Bulst and Genet 1988; Hallam 1986).

Changes in military technology similarly eroded the dominant position of the mounted knight. Massed infantry with pike men (at the battle of Courtrai), longbow (Agincourt, Crecy) heralded the end of heavy cavalry's pre-eminence on the battlefield (Contamine 1984). The introduction of gunpowder and siege artillery sealed the fate of the feudal castle (McNeill 1982; Pepper and Adams 1986). From then on the balance swung to larger standing armies (as emerged in France towards the end of the Hundred Years War). These were paid professionals—*pas d'Argent, pas de Suisse*—without money one could not buy the vaunted Swiss pike men. Or as Machiavelli proffered, borrowing from the classics, money became "the sinews of power."

This combination of economic development and military transformation favored those lords who could mobilize resources on a

larger scale than the previous lordly domains. Monarchs, who could garner resources from their subjects, either through careful alliances with the towns, or by force, overcame lordly opposition. The discrete feudal domains thus increasingly were forged into larger territorial units. Warfare favored great central administration (Ames and Rapp 1977; Parker 1979; Tilly 1990)

However, kings were not entirely successful in monopolizing all resources of power. In order to garner support from some of the most powerful lords, kings had to concede considerable local powers of jurisdiction. Feudal privileges for ecclesiastics and lords remained in effect in parts of France till 1793. Indeed, half the complaints registered in the Cahiers de Doleances against such privileges, implore the French king to ameliorate such feudal prerogatives (Kula 1986).

Around the late 10<sup>th</sup> century the Ottonian Germans had also started to resurrect the idea of a return of empire. But their idea of what should constitute such an empire, clashed with a resurgent and renewed papacy that had gained new authority after the Gregorian reforms. This was not a clash of a secular actor yielding military force against an actor yielding merely cultural (religious) resources. Both actors claimed equal status. The German emperor claimed to be Vicar of God and denounced the pope as a heretic, while the papacy excommunicated the emperor as the devil incarnate, while mobilizing

military forces of his own (Tierney 1964). In these clashes—not fully settled till the failure of the Germans by the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century—kings carved out their own political space, siding opportunistically with either actor if need be (Barraclough 1984; Straus 1985a, 1985b).

Thus, to use John Ruggie's words, authority was heteronomous (Ruggie 1986; 1993). No actor could monopolize the various resources of social power. Instead, although there were distinct political units, their claims to authority cross-cut and overlay other claims to authority. The popes argued they were the legitimate rulers over entire Christian Europe. German emperors advanced exactly the same. But this contrasted with the views of kings that they were sovereign in their own realm. The imperial claim of Germans in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, to be beholden to no other ruler, was soon mimicked by similar claims of the kings (*rex est imperator in regno suo*). Royal claims to tax citizens were challenged by papal demands that he had the right to tax resources of religious subjects in the French realm, and so on.

In other areas and particularly in the economic realm, centralizing monarchs were far more successful (Strayer 1970). Additionally, in Northern Europe, city-leagues became virtually sovereign entities when the German emperor turned to domination of Italy, and failed. These city-leagues wielded considerable economic and military power in their own right. Of these the Hanseatic League

was the most powerful, uniting at its peak almost 200 towns (Fuhrmann 1986; Lensen and Heitling; Schildauer 1988; Wernicke 1983))

In sum, we can distinguish numerous organizational entities (monarchies, bishoprics, papacy, Holy Roman Empire, cities and city-leagues) but the authority structures vying for the loyalty of subjects, sometimes were religious, imperial, royal, feudal, or urban—each yielding whatever resource they might control. Attempts to establish universal imperial hierarchy had failed. Some of the polities in the system were indeed subject to imperial or papal authority, but this hierarchy never encompassed all the elements of the European order.

Interactions with the world outside this system were increasing. Trade and cultural influences (particularly from the Middle East) had started to alter the European landscape. The boundaries of the relatively self contained European system had started to fray.

---Here schema 3: Early Modern Europe---

Summary Characteristics:

1. Discreteness low. Rival and overlapping claims to same power resources.
2. Diffuse polarity, overlapping authority claims, issue specific.
3. Hybrid authority claims, contested hierarchy.
4. Intra systemic interaction: moderate

Inter-systemic density: moderate (increasing interaction with the Middle East and Asia)

Behavioral propositions:

H1. Weak balancing behavior

Multiple contesting authority claims and cross-cutting loyalties. This combined with moderate intra-systemic density prevents systematic balancing against extra systemic pressure (Muslim)

H2. Frequent conflict due to multiplicity of claims to authority

Contending hierarchies (Emperor vs. papacy); anti-hierarchy (kings and lords vs. emperor and pope); contending lords and monarchs

H3. Mobilizational capacity low

Due to overlapping and cross cutting loyalties, inability of political elites to bundle all sources of power. Thus, frequent but low level conflict of small scale.

H4. Extra-systemic contacts can lead to power shifts and destabilization

Mobilization of out of system resources

VI. State Anarchy, Multi-System Framework

Case: The European State System circa 1500-contemporary period

The imperial ambition of the Holy Roman Empire technically only came to an end by 1806. But in reality the German ambitions to restore the empire—which was neither Holy, nor Roman—had faltered by the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Spanish Habsburg attempt arguably had the greatest pretensions to re-establish something along the lines of a European empire, bolstering its military successes with religious claims to legitimately rule over Europe. French resistance, unsuccessful military campaigns in the Lowlands and against Britain, combined with the Protestant Reformation, doomed it to failure. The idea of a united European Empire that could bundle cultural, economic, military resources with a legitimate power to unite the disparate polities formally came to an end with the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. While there would be isolated attempts for European hegemony, these projects were based on the expansionist ambitions of particular rulers rather than attempts to wear the mantle of the earlier Roman legacy.

The Peace of Westphalia formalized what had been a long drawn out process (Gross 1968). It marked the failure of universal empire or a papal theocracy to govern Europe. Instead monarchs consolidated their power into what gradually became recognizable states.

Militarily, central governments acquired, as Max Weber noted, the sole possession of the means of force (Gerth and Mills 1946). Army sizes increased exponentially, with the greatest powers able to raise

armies of tens of thousands of troops (Parker 1979; 1988). Warfare became ubiquitous and omnipresent. Between 1500 and 1700, Russia was at war each year, France two out of every three years, and Britain one out of three. Waging war constituted the main expenditure of government. Even English expenditure on warfare sometimes accounted for 90% of all government expense (Brewer 1989).

Economic development and military conflict went hand in hand in classic mercantilist tradition. The ability to raise revenue influenced one's ability to wage war. Victory on the battlefield in turn yielded territorial gains and resources. Governments took an active interest in developing early capitalism. The Crown past statutes and financed the move of Italian entrepreneurs and military engineers to England. The French monarchy provided monopoly contracts to military innovators and enterprises.

Over time, governments started to reach directly into economic activity at all levels. Protection of patent rights facilitated innovation. Government established banking systems; public education (by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century); and standardized weights and measures (North and Weingast 1989; Kula 1986).

Culturally too, the sovereign, territorial state managed to direct individual loyalties. In an insightful essay, Alessandro Pizzorno (1987) suggested that in the wake of the Investiture Conflict, secular rulers

managed to acquire many of the functions of the church, among these the ultimate devotion of its subjects to its authority. If his dating of this phenomenon seems premature, it cannot be gainsaid that by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the state and nation had become the locus of the citizen's loyalty.

The modern state, furthermore, succeeded in eliminating more natural loyalties of family, kin, and village (Goody 1983; Hobsbawn 1990). It destroyed the ties that connect individuals in one's immediate circle and reconstructed them into an abstract affinity with individuals whom one only knew as fellow citizens. Peasants became Frenchmen (Weber 1976). It did so by state sponsored education and by the conscription into national armies.

At the same time it managed to eliminate trans-state loyalties, such as religious ties to fellow believers. Ever since Augsburg (1555), territory and religious affiliation were reconciled. Sovereignty thus became more than simply the claim to absolute authority within one's borders and the restriction of extra-territorial claims to authority (Hinsley 1969, 1986; Stankiewicz 1969). The sovereign became the final locus not only of decision making but the repository of individual loyalty.

These changes within Europe coincided with the violent break-out to the extra-European world. The Portuguese and Spanish warrior

aristocrats had scarcely rid the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors, before their flag flew across all parts of the globe. Within three short decades Portuguese and Spanish seafarers had circumvented the West African doldrums, crossed the North Atlantic and discovered the Latin American mainland. They circumvented the Cape of Good Hope before the 15<sup>th</sup> century was over, and by the 1520s they would complete the first global circumnavigation (Lewis and Runyan 1985; Scammel 1981). The Chinese had beaten the Iberians to Africa but remained indifferent. This was not the case for the Europeans. Nothing signifies their ambitions more than the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), in which Portugal and Spain divided the world outside of Europe among themselves. Portugal was granted all lands east of the agreed dividing line, and Spain all lands to the West. Dutch, English, and French imperial pretensions were not far behind.

In other words, the European world system now started to interact far more intensively with the other international systems, or world systems in Abu Lughod's (1989) terms. Goods and commodities started to flow across all parts of the globe (Curtin 1984; Tracy 1990). The European states gradually absorbed the extra-European world in its system as subject territories. The European system of discrete and juridically sovereign and equal states only became a world order with the extension of sovereign equality to the former colonial territories

(Jackson 1987; James 1986).

To conclude, the European state system consisted of territorially demarcated and functionally discrete units. These polities managed to transform the heteronomous nature of overlapping and crosscutting claims to authority, which were often based on distinct types of social power, into homogeneous authorities. Simply put, they managed to combine various sources of power and become the final locus of cultural identification; the monopolist of the means of violence; the ultimate source of law and adjudication; and they forged national economies.

This system explicitly intended to negate imperial attempts to establish authority over and above these distinct polities. This system was not self contained but it increasingly spread its influence to other parts of the globe. Economic and cultural flows back to Europe influenced the development of the European states. The European system of this period was an open one. Inter-systemic density increased exponentially over this period, absorbing all other systems.

---Here Schema 4: European state system---

Summary Characteristics:

1. Discreteness high.
2. Multipolar system with attempts at hegemony.
3. Anarchical.

4. Intra-systemic density high; Inter-systemic density increasing from moderate to high at the end of this period

Behavioral propositions:

H 1. High degree of balancing and bandwagoning behavior.

Significant intra-systemic interaction, and clear differentiation of relevant political units leads to mechanical process of balancing and alliances. Hegemonic and imperial challenges confronted by countervailing alliances.

H 2. High mobilizational capacity of polities.

Ability of political elites to monopolize sources of social power leads to large armies and economic development.

H3. Frequent warfare on a large scale within the system.

Lack of cross cutting loyalties (clear in group and out group), high levels of mobilization, combined with anarchy, produces attempts to dominate other states.

H4. Increasing warfare with extra-systemic actors.

Higher levels of inter-systemic interaction, coupled with high mobilizational capacity by units within the system leads to expansionism.

H5. Inter-systemic interaction leads to intra-systemic instability

The ability of actors to gain new allies or resources outside

the system, makes balancing within the system more complicated due to external power resources

## VII. State Anarchy: Single System

### Case: The Era of Globalization

We are perhaps witnessing the end of the state centric system. For the foreseeable future there seems little chance that hierarchy might emerge in this system. Political authority remains divided among discrete units. Only in the European Union are there traces of distinct polities surrendering sovereignty to a higher authority. But even there such surrender is partial (Cornett and Caporaso 1992; Sbragia 1992). Sensitive areas, as foreign policy, remain national prerogatives.

It is less clear, however, that states can still monopolize all the various sources of social power (Mlinar 1992). Non-governmental organizations, multinational enterprises, even trans-local criminal organizations, sometimes yield substantial economic resources. Trans-local ethnic networks, similarly, can mobilize considerable loyalties and financial reserves. Some religions, in emphasizing their trans-local identity, might contend with states for the loyalty of their citizens (Piscatori 1986).

International travel, migration, refugee flows, instant

communications, cultural dissemination of music styles and clothes, all in their own way complicate the self identification of citizens with the national state. With globalization has also come a realization that externalities, as pollution, health hazards, climate change, cannot be addressed within the prevalent modes of discrete governmental structure (Lipshutz and Conca 1993).

John Herz once argued that the advent of nuclear weapons heralded the end of the nation-state, in that the state could no longer guarantee the protection of its citizens (Herz 1976). At best it could assure only the (Mutually Assured) Destruction of the aggressor. His argument might be generalized: the state today might no longer claim ultimate devotion of its citizens; it cannot isolate the domestic realm from global economic flows and cycles; and in dealing with trans-territorial problems it has to recognize limits to its sovereign powers.

The contemporary system is different from earlier systems in another sense. It is a uniquely closed system: the closure is final. In previous eras, closure emanated from natural barriers, technological limitations, or self-induced closure (as in Tokugawa Japan). But such closure also had the possibility of dynamic change. Technological changes might give one the ability to break out of one's own world system, as, for example, naval technology brought about the end of the Mediterranean world (Braudel 1984, Lewis and Runyan 1985). Or,

changes outside of one's system might lead to the incursion of outsiders into a previously closed system (the black ships of Perry, the Spanish conquest of the great American empires, or the Mongol advances into Europe, come to mind).

The modern system, however, is closed. New actors cannot emerge and encroach from the fringes. There are no other world systems with distinct patterns of trade, cultural mores, or heretofore unknown authority structures. Dynamic density has forged the diverse world systems into one.

--Here schema 5: The Era of Globalization---

#### Characteristics

1. Discreteness high but perhaps declining.
  2. Polarity diffuse, issue specific: militarily unipolar, economically multi-polar
  3. Anarchy, but institutional sites of constitutional order.
  4. Intra-systemic density high
- Inter-systemic density high: single system.

#### Behavioral Propositions

H1. High degree of intra-systemic density makes balancing and bandwagoning possible.

But diminishing discreteness of political affiliation leads to

overlapping and cross cutting identification.

H2. Closed system makes balancing transparent.

No extra-systemic means to change the balance.

H3. Mobilizational capacity of political units is high.

But declining discreteness leads to possible alternative sites of identification and loyalty.

H4. Imperial or non benign hegemonic orders are not viable.

Due to balancing behavior see H1.

### Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that one can typologize international systems, or world orders, along several dimensions. To what extent does the system consist of discrete political units? More specifically, to what extent do such units consolidate the various sources of power?

Second, are the relationships between these units vertical or horizontal? For many parts of the world, universal imperial forms seem to have held sway with occasional, cyclical fragmentation to something akin to feudal orders (Lewis 1974, Unger 1987). The European state system in that regard seems relatively unique in that a universal imperial system only held sway in the Roman period.

Third, how might one typify the level of interactions within a system and between different international systems? In other words, did that international system have a high degree of intra-systemic

density? And did that system have dense inter-systemic contacts? (In that case we would describe the boundaries of such a system as open.) Or was the inter-systemic density low? (Which we would regard as a closed system.)

Fourth, if actors are discretely arranged and if there is at least a reasonable level of dynamic density, then polarity enters as an additional structural component. Actors must be distinguishable from each other and autonomously possess power resources, and they must interact with each other for one to meaningfully speak of balancing or bandwagoning behavior.

Clearly the range of distinguishing characteristics does not allow for a strict comparison by methods of difference or agreement given the number of permutations and combinations and the limited number of empirical examples. However, it is possible to draw inferences regarding the likely consequences of such characteristics. Indeed, when certain conditions operate jointly they might produce behavioral patterns which hold across different manifestations of the ideal types that have been put forward here.

Some of the empirical examples discussed in this paper which are based on the European historical experience likely have analogs in other regions. As said, universal imperial forms of organization seem to have been ubiquitous and present through much of recorded

history. Similarly, ideal-typical feudalism, in various empirical guises, has occurred in highly diverse settings ranging from the Orient to Africa.

The criteria I propose in this paper might serve as a means to order the immense universe of historical cases. Moreover, by using such other empirical examples as templates one might test the speculative behavioral propositions that I offer.

It should also be clear from this paper that the different connotations of empire have significant behavioral implications when studied from a systems perspective. Universal empire, in effect, was coterminous with the system. Empire was self contained with sporadic extra-systemic contact (which might explain the longevity of universalist types of empire in world history.) Indeed, extra-systemic contact might be deliberately curtailed to prevent the emergence of cross-systemic alliances or new resources for potential opponents to the imperial system (as in Togukawa Japan). Internal balancing was curtailed by administrative techniques keeping local intermediaries divided.

In systems which experienced overlapping and crosscutting claims, as Europe in the later Middle Ages, empire was simply one attempt among others to bundle various power resources. Although imperial pretenders still laid claim to universalist legitimacy, de facto

the system consisted of diverse and fragmented forms of rule, which varied by issue and geographic space. In such a system, structural realist understandings of balancing and bandwagoning among clearly recognized poles of power, anachronistically suggests a stability and structure in the system that simply was not there.

Empire in modern Europe, from say 1500 on, was not a universalist enterprise but was premised on the existence of equal and even stronger powers within a system of independent actors. Empires within Europe were hardly distinguishable from, nor did they lay claim to rule over, other actors. (Some exceptions might have been Charles V's attempts or Napoleon's, but by and large the principles of the Westphalian settlement signified a much more fundamental understanding.) While we routinely speak of the "British Empire" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it is radically different from earlier imperial forms (lacking for one thing an emperor !). Empire, delegitimized in its traditional universalist claims in Europe, was thus practiced outside the system. In this understanding of empire, extra-systemic contact was not to be avoided, but actually justified the connotation of empire within Europe.

In short, empire itself has had multiple connotations in international politics. This paper has located such understandings within a systems framework and has argued that such diverse understandings of the structural position of empire vis-à-vis other

actors within and beyond the relevant international system, leads to specific expectations about how those units will interact.

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