

Spring 1996

# Reflections on the McRevolution: A Review of Jihad vs. McWorld: How the Planet is Both Falling Apart and Coming Together and What This Means for Democracy, by Benjamin R. Barber

David Fidler

*Indiana University Maurer School of Law*, [dfidler@indiana.edu](mailto:dfidler@indiana.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls>



Part of the [International Law Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Fidler, David (1996) "Reflections on the McRevolution: A Review of Jihad vs. McWorld: How the Planet is Both Falling Apart and Coming Together and What This Means for Democracy, by Benjamin R. Barber," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 7.

Available at: <http://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls/vol3/iss2/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Law School Journals at Digital Repository @ Maurer Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* by an authorized administrator of Digital Repository @ Maurer Law. For more information, please contact [wattn@indiana.edu](mailto:wattn@indiana.edu).



**JEROME HALL LAW LIBRARY**

INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
Maurer School of Law  
Bloomington

## Book Review

### **Reflections on the McRevolution: A Review of *Jihad vs. McWorld: How the Planet Is Both Falling Apart and Coming Together and What This Means for Democracy*, by Benjamin R. Barber Times Books, 1995, 381 pp.**

REVIEWED BY DAVID P. FIDLER\*

In 1790, Edmund Burke published a book warning Britain and Europe of the great threat posed by the violent upheaval of the French Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Burke went to great lengths to demonstrate that the real threat posed by the French Revolution was its ideology, which could cross borders and corrupt the hearts and minds of people in every country in Europe. Burke feared that the Jacobin ideology would undermine and eventually destroy the British constitution and European civilization unless Britain and its allies crushed the evil before it could work its wicked ways. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was read and debated at the highest levels of British political society.

In 1995, Benjamin R. Barber published a book warning the United States and other liberal democracies of the threat posed by the processes of globalization--the universal dominance of a capitalist inspired, consumer-monopolizing ideology (McWorld) and the often violent ethnic, racial, and religious backlashes against the rapid homogenizing of society and soul produced by capitalism's global expansion (Jihad).<sup>2</sup> Barber goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the real threat posed by McWorld is its "videology,"<sup>3</sup> which crosses borders and corrupts the hearts and minds of people in every country in the world. Barber fears that the videology of

---

\* Associate Professor of Law, Indiana University School of Law (Bloomington).

1. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in 8 THE WRITINGS AND SPEECHES OF EDMUND BURKE 53 (L.G. Mitchell ed., 1989).

2. BENJAMIN R. BARBER, *JIHAD VS. MCWORLD: HOW THE PLANET IS BOTH FALLING APART AND COMING TOGETHER AND WHAT THIS MEANS FOR DEMOCRACY* (1995). This book elaborates a thesis Barber first introduced in an article in *The Atlantic* and which he further explored in a previous edition of this Journal. See Benjamin R. Barber, *Global Democracy or Global Law: Which Comes First?* 1 IND. J. GLOBAL LEGAL STUD. 119 (1993).

3. BARBER, *supra* note 2, at 17.

McWorld is undermining democracy and the nation-state through its strangulation of culture and civil society and through its twisted conspiracy with Jihad, which violently convulses against McWorld's onslaught while embracing McWorld's methods. Barber's reflections on the McRevolution<sup>4</sup> in the world are being read and discussed at the highest levels of American politics. President Clinton, for example, has publicly praised and recommended *Jihad vs. McWorld*.<sup>5</sup>

Burke's *Reflections* and Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* are both conservative works seeking to protect traditional society and politics against radical innovations that threaten to undermine fundamental values and belief systems. Burke's warnings about the French Revolution proved prophetic as the Revolution descended into terror and militaristic despotism. Whether Barber's warnings about the McRevolution prove equally prophetic remains to be seen, but Barber's fears and prognostications about the demise of democracy and the nation-state under the impact of the McRevolution are difficult to accept because they are not supported by a persuasive historical analysis or normative argument.

## I. THE MCREVOLUTION

### A. *The Dynamics of the McRevolution*

The McRevolution in international affairs that Barber fears has two key forces: McWorld and Jihad. "McWorld" is Barber's metaphor for the product of the process by which globally-expansionist capitalism presses "nations into one homogenous global theme park . . . tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce."<sup>6</sup> McWorld is a reality in which everything is contrived, artificial, and "imagineered"<sup>7</sup>—everything, that is, except profit. Culture, individual responsibility, political accountability,

---

4. "McRevolution" is not Barber's term but my own attempt to capture the supposedly revolutionary nature of the developments Barber analyzes.

5. See *Remarks at a Breakfast with Religious Leaders*, 31 WKLY. COMP. PRES. DOC. 1521, 1525 (Sept. 8, 1995). President Clinton's praise for *Jihad vs. McWorld* is ironic because Barber attacks the North American Free Trade Agreement—one of President Clinton's proudest accomplishments—as "McWorld's global strategy in its North American guise." BARBER, *supra* note 2, at 98. President Clinton has also appeared on MTV, which Barber slams as "mindless." *Id.* at 109. President Clinton is, therefore, both a creator and consumer of McWorld—the very thing Barber identifies as corruptive of democracy.

6. BARBER, *supra* note 2, at 4.

7. *Id.* at 97.

concepts of community, notions of civic responsibility, and democracy itself are jettisoned in favor of an ideology that maximizes profits while reducing life's meaning to eating at McDonald's, watching MTV, or visiting a mall. It is important to grasp how comprehensive and powerful Barber believes McWorld is: Barber believes the forces creating McWorld corrupt the individual soul, undermine communities, erode the nation-state, destroy democracy, and reduce international relations to the dynamics of shopping at a mall or visiting a theme park. The scope of Barber's "McWorld" is breathtaking, which is one reason (though by no means the only reason) why we should pause to catch our breath before we buy into this concept.

"Jihad" is Barber's metaphor for the yearning "to recapture a world that existed prior to cosmopolitan capitalism and was defined by religious mysteries, hierarchical communities, spellbinding traditions, and historical torpor."<sup>8</sup> Jihad represents a force in the world opposed to the culture homogenizing, profit maximizing spirit of McWorld. Barber contrasts Jihad, which he claims is a sort of "post-modern 'new' nationalism" with "traditional nationalism."<sup>9</sup> Jihad has "the nation-state as its target" while old-fashioned nationalism was the source of the nation-state.<sup>10</sup> Examples of Jihad include: (1) Jihad within democracies, which (except for Germany) is a pacific, pallid version of Jihad,<sup>11</sup> (2) Jihad within Asia, which takes two forms (a) internal Jihad against Asian states by cultural minorities, and (b) external Jihad by Asian states reasserting "Asian values" against the western values of McWorld,<sup>12</sup> (3) Jihad within transitional democracies,<sup>13</sup> which takes a tribal form that is "antipluralist and antimodern,"<sup>14</sup> and (4) Jihad in the Islamic world, which Barber terms "essential Jihad" because its opposition to McWorld stems from religious tenets.<sup>15</sup> Like Barber's use of McWorld as a metaphor, Jihad in Barber's analysis covers a vast array of political, social, and cultural phenomena.

Barber attempts to demonstrate in Part I of his book the rise of McWorld. He argues that dependence on foreign sources of natural resources has eliminated all prospects for economic self-sufficiency and rendered "debate

---

8. *Id.* at 157.

9. *Id.* at 165.

10. *Id.*

11. *Id.* at ch. 11.

12. *Id.* at ch. 12.

13. *Id.* at ch. 13.

14. *Id.* at 196.

15. *Id.* at ch. 14.

about national interest or natural independence . . . increasingly irrelevant.”<sup>16</sup> The “resource imperative” embodies the “enhanced interdependence”<sup>17</sup> needed by McWorld and the potential “divisiveness, injustice, and weakness”<sup>18</sup>—traits of Jihad—created by the discrepancies between developed and developing countries’ use of mineral and energy resources. The patterns of resource usage in the international system weaken the nation-state through dependence on foreign sources of energy and minerals and through the agitation of anti-modern political forces within nation-states that export energy and mineral resources to developed countries. The changing nature of industrial production from a predominantly national activity to a transnational endeavor also undermines the nation-state.<sup>19</sup> But what really serves as the powerful dynamic for McWorld is the transition from hard goods (industrial products) to soft goods (knowledge, information, and entertainment) and from soft goods to services (what Barber calls the “infotainment telesector”).<sup>20</sup>

The cutting edge of McWorld, and the source of great dangers for democracy in Barber’s opinion, is the growing economic power of information, telecommunication, and entertainment services.<sup>21</sup> The growing importance of the global infotainment telesector explains the frenzy of media mergers and acquisitions in the United States and elsewhere that Barber surveys with a critical and concerned eye.<sup>22</sup> Lurking within the infotainment telesector is the “telesector videology,” a post-modern ideology that trumpets materialism and consumption as ends in themselves through the powerful medium of homogenized, U.S.-style telecommunications.<sup>23</sup>

The objective of the telesector videology is the creation and perpetuation of “Planet Hollywood.” Barber wants us to understand that the advent of McWorld is not just an economic transformation of international affairs but a profoundly political event. McWorld is in search of citizens, not citizens as democrats but as consumers. Its targets are political and cultural institutions that stand in the way of the promotion of the “values necessary to material consumption.”<sup>24</sup> Governments stand helplessly by as multinational companies

---

16. *Id.* at 34.

17. *Id.* at 43.

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.* at 54.

20. *Id.* at 80.

21. *Id.* at 77.

22. *Id.* at ch. 9.

23. *Id.* at ch. 6.

24. *Id.* at 109.

create monopolies in the infotainment telesector, and cultures suffer, via satellite, the numbing and dumbing effects of McDonald's, MTV, and *Beavis and Butthead*. The hard, identifiable sovereignty of states seeps almost imperceptibly into the hands of the Berlusconis, Turners, and Murdochs of McWorld.

Interestingly, Barber does not present the vast array of forces he identifies under the rubric "Jihad" as a simple conglomeration of reactionary efforts against the onslaught of McWorld. Barber wants us to see Jihad and McWorld as dialectical: McWorld fosters Jihad, Jihad nurtures McWorld. This seemingly illogical relationship has at its heart the idea of culture as commodity. McWorld needs cultural diversity (the seedbed of Jihad) to sell cultural homogeneity. The realm of Jihad ironically constitutes the emerging markets of McWorld. Further, Jihad unwittingly prepares the path for McWorld by undermining the nation-state from within and by discrediting notions of cultural diversity and conservation.<sup>25</sup> Barber's dialectic, like Marx's, has an end point. The winner in the long term, Barber predicts, will eventually be McWorld.<sup>26</sup>

#### *B. The Dangers of the McRevolution*

As previously mentioned, Barber finds in McWorld a grave threat to the nation-state, democracy, civil society, and the human soul. McWorld's attack is essentially a two-pronged attack on democracy according to Barber. First, McWorld inculcates the values of materialism into the lives of its victims, reducing the capacity of individuals to create and sustain the institutions and dynamics of civil society—churches, civic organizations, schools, and community identity and spirit. Barber believes that a healthy democracy needs a healthy civil society because the latter develops in the people the deliberative capacities needed for democratic government. McWorld serves the passions of personal gratification and erodes the ability to deliberate about public goods. Second, McWorld destroys the nation-state, which Barber believes has served as the best foundation for democratic politics yet found. Since global democracy and city-state democracy are equally unrealistic, Barber believes that democracy's historical relationship with the nation-state remains vital to the future of democracy. But, as Barber observes, while democracies prefer

---

25. *Id.* at 5.

26. *Id.* at 82.

markets, markets--particularly global markets--do not necessarily prefer democracy.

### *C. The Confederal Counter-Revolution*

Barber offers a solution to the McRevolution that relies on confederalism.<sup>27</sup> In starting a global counter-revolution, Barber would have us forget ideas of global government, international law, and further partition of nation-states to embrace a global confederal strategy. Barber recommends the American Articles of Confederation as "relevant reading."<sup>28</sup> Barber wants to counter the McRevolution by reforming the international system on the Swiss confederal model.<sup>29</sup> Barber believes that a confederal counter-revolution "may offer a viable alternative" because it would give states "sufficient time to live together to discover the need for more integrative remedies--and to acquire the trust and tolerance in which such remedies depend" and "offers a gradualist, voluntary, trust-building strategy of supranationality."<sup>30</sup>

## II. THE MCREVOLUTION?

Barber's thesis that democracy is being crushed by the dialectical vise formed by McWorld and Jihad is provocative mainly because it pits democracy and capitalism as the great antagonists of this post-modern historical period. As he points out, the traditional liberal assumption is that capitalism and democracy are allies, and that where one goes the other is sure to follow. Barber is re-visiting an old controversy that extends back to Adam Smith: Does capitalism require democratic political institutions? Joseph Cropsey interpreted Smith as believing that free political institutions are necessary to the preservation of commerce.<sup>31</sup> Albert Hirschman, on the other hand, believed that Smith thought "that economics can go it alone: within wide limits of tolerance, political progress is not needed as a prerequisite for, nor is it likely to be a consequence of, economic advance."<sup>32</sup> This debate is

---

27. *Id.* at 290.

28. *Id.* at 289.

29. *Id.* at 290.

30. *Id.*

31. JOSEPH CROPSEY, *POLITY AND ECONOMY: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF ADAM SMITH* 95 (1957).

32. ALBERT O. HIRSCHMAN, *THE PASSIONS AND THE INTERESTS* 103-04 (1977).

alive today in the recent controversy about "Asian values," a phrase denoting the Asian preference for vigorous capitalism and more authoritarian politics than practiced in the West. Barber is clearly in agreement with Hirschman because he believes, and attempts to demonstrate that, capitalism pursued globally does establish or promote democracy. He also uses Asia as an example to support his assertion.<sup>33</sup> Barber gives this old controversy a new twist by positing a dialectical relationship between two apparently opposite forces: nationalism and globalization. Barber's book poses a challenge because he forces us to question the association of capitalism and democracy and the assumption that nationalism and globalization are antithetical. In Barber's analysis, opposites attract and the seemingly harmonious engage in a bitter struggle for dominance. Barber's unconventional approach, combined with his often pungent rhetoric, makes *Jihad vs. McWorld* an entertaining read.

Upon deeper and more sober reflection, however, entertainment constitutes one of the few positive characteristics of Barber's book. Barber's key analytical devices—McWorld, Jihad, and their dialectical relationship—do not withstand scrutiny. Further, after the roar Barber emits in his attack on McWorld, his confederal counter-revolution concludes the book not with a bang but with a whimper. In fact, the weakness of Barber's response to the McRevolution underscores the fragility of his analytical approach.

#### A. *Capitalism and Democracy*

Underneath Barber's dislike of McWorld resides a more fundamental dislike of capitalism.<sup>34</sup> Although Barber focuses mainly on McWorld's destruction of the nation-state and democracy around the globe, he also makes it clear that he distrusts capitalism deeply. His warning that the infotainment telesector and its videology undermine civil society contains within it the warning that capitalism as an economic system and philosophy is the enemy of a deliberative citizenry. Barber separates a society into three countervailing forces: the government, civil society, and private enterprise. Barber believes

---

33. BARBER, *supra* note 2, at 185.

34. Other reviewers of *Jihad vs. McWorld* have commented on Barber's negative attitude towards capitalism. Francis Fukuyama claims Barber's book "is marred . . . by his snobbish distaste for capitalism." Francis Fukuyama, *Book Review: Jihad vs. McWorld*, FOREIGN AFF., Nov./Dec. 1995, at 116. Martin Sieff notes Barber's "loathing for large-scale free market capitalism" and dismisses *Jihad vs. McWorld* as "the latest fashionable excuse to hate the free market." Martin Sieff, *Trendy Excuse to Hate Free Markets*, WASH. TIMES, Sept. 16, 1995, at C3 (book review).

that the key force is civil society because it limits the government's power and blunts the brutal logic of the free market. Further, Barber favors a very activist, regulatory government as an additional bulwark against the effects of capitalism. If civil society is destroyed, tyranny of either the state or the market washes over citizens and turns them into either oppressed peoples or consumer drones. Barber clearly thinks that, in McWorld, governments are increasingly helpless and citizens resemble more and more vapid mall shoppers. The McRevolution has overturned the balance of power in society. The villain in Barber's analysis is capitalism.

The biggest problem with Barber's depiction of capitalism is his unwillingness to see any effects in free markets that bolster civil society, active government, and democracy. He is so anti-free market that he makes what must historically be considered incredible assertions. Barber seriously questions whether Germans living in east Berlin really have more liberty now that neon Coca-Cola signs have replaced statues of Marx and Engels in Marx-Engelsplatz.<sup>35</sup> Apparently in Barber's mind the right to vote, own property, travel, live free from fear of a midnight visit of the Stasi, visit relatives in other European nations, read what one pleases, have individual self-determination, and--yes--eat at McDonald's and drink Coca-Cola count for nothing. Later, Barber describes with disdain a scene in Warsaw where people line the streets to cheer at the sight of Coca-Cola trucks.<sup>36</sup> Barber forgets (or does not understand) that such scenes in Poland and elsewhere reverberated with cheers for the political and civil freedoms that allow citizens to drink Coca-Cola. The hideous nature of communist rule in the former Soviet empire does not exist in Barber's account of the recent growth of capitalism. In fact, Barber equates "Hollywood's hegemony" with Stalinist uniformity.<sup>37</sup> It is very difficult to take Barber seriously on the basis of such arguments.

In trying to make sense out of Barber's desire to equate capitalism with Stalinism, I concluded that what Barber was trying to argue was that freedom under capitalism means nothing to those without capital. Coca-Cola signs have replaced statues of Marx and Engels in Marx-Engelsplatz, but East Germans have no more liberty because they lack the money and resources to enjoy "the real thing." The destruction of the Berlin Wall, under Barber's logic, merely replaced one form of tyranny with another because East Germans

---

35. BARBER, *supra* note 2, at 6.

36. *Id.* at 70.

37. *Id.* at 115.

gained no liberty in the event. Perhaps only someone who never lived under real tyranny, and who takes for granted the myriad benefits offered by capitalism, could make such an argument.

Barber's glossing over of the tyranny represented by statues of Marx and Engels in Marx-Engelsplatz comes forth in his condemnation of capitalism's importation into the transitional democracies of the former Soviet empire. He rejects the argument, employed by Jeffrey Sachs and others, that capitalism is needed to establish democracy in the countries formerly under Soviet sway. Barber believes that democracy creates the conditions for capitalism, not the other way around. He asserts that the application of "wild capitalism" to the countries of the former Soviet empire has caused untold social damage and human misery: "I cannot begin to do justice to the havoc wrought by the attempt to impose an economic solution to the problems of democracy on the world's developing regions."<sup>38</sup>

The problems with this aspect of Barber's analysis are rife. First, Barber asserts that democracy historically produced capitalism. His evidence for this belief is that "only in the nineteenth century did a democratized England embark on policies of full-scale industrialization, free trade . . . and economic empire."<sup>39</sup> In Barber's history, private enterprise apparently did not exist prior to the English industrial revolution. Further, Barber shows no awareness *anywhere* in his book that the right to own and to dispose freely of private property is a *civil right* enshrined at the heart of liberal, democratic philosophy. Private enterprise is organically related to democracy. Barber does not even pretend to explore what he admits is "a discernable historical correlation between democracy and capitalism,"<sup>40</sup> instead, he is content to separate, artificially and without analysis, capitalism and democracy and to pit them against each other.<sup>41</sup>

Second, Barber claims that capitalism destroys established civil societies in western democracies and has crushed nascent civil societies in the central and east European countries. Numerous problems arise with such an assertion. To begin, Barber makes no attempt to clarify what he means by civil society. He talks about civil society as the realm of the citizen deliberating about public

---

38. *Id.* at 246.

39. *Id.* at 237.

40. *Id.*

41. Fukuyama makes a similar point when he argues that "the capitalist global economy is intimately related in ways unacknowledged in this book to the success and stability of democracy and civil society." Fukuyama, *supra* note 34, at 116.

goods and exercising such deliberative conclusions through an activist government to restrain the market. I think what Barber really laments is the demise of the role of the activist, interventionist, and highly regulative government. Barber separates capitalism from civil society—again artificially and without analysis. This is not the place to discuss the rich literature on civil society, but perhaps it is reasonable to assert that Barber’s conception of civil society as a source of activist government is questionable. Older liberal conceptions of civil society included private enterprise as a core part of the *civitas*. The marketplace is more than a random exchange of property; it is where relationships are built, confidence and social order underpinned, and wealth generated to sustain families, communities, and governments. The impact of globalization on older notions and forms of civil society is a serious question worth exploring. Barber does not, however, get us very far into this question because his separation of civil society from capitalism provides no foundation for thoughtful reflection about the impact of globalization.

Third, Barber vilifies the introduction of “wild capitalism” into developing regions of the world. His only two detailed examples supporting this vilification are eastern Germany and Russia, but he claims that “wild capitalism” is taking its toll in such places as the Czech Republic and Hungary—supposed success stories in the transition from communism to democratic capitalism. “Wild capitalism” is Barber’s term (a modification of Solzhenitsyn’s notion of “savage capitalism”) for *laissez-faire* economics applied to countries without effective governments or established civil societies.<sup>42</sup> Faced with no countervailing forces, capitalism dictates materialistic values and destroys local culture. What is odd about Barber’s argument is that he seems to blame capitalism for everything. Although he says it is unfair to blame capitalism for all post-communist woes, he proceeds to do exactly that. There is virtually no analysis or even acknowledgment of the utter disaster communism was for the politics, civil society, and economies of the nations unfortunate enough to adopt, or have adopted for them, Stalinist tyranny. In Russia, five years of capitalism receives more wrath from Barber than seventy years of totalitarian oppression. Barber does not even dare to think that the total absence of civil society in Russia could perhaps be the result of seventy years of despotism rather than five years of fitful and frustrating capitalist endeavors.

---

42. BARBER, *supra* note 2, at 236.

Barber's indignation at how capitalism has been introduced into eastern Germany and Russia also falls flat because it violates one of his own cherished observations. Barber quickly condemns the attempt to build democratic societies through economic development after only five years. He argues that the claims of Jeffrey Sachs and his cohorts, that the development of democracy and stable capitalism will take time, are empty because the time frame is one or two generations down the road.<sup>43</sup> While trashing the efforts being made in Russia and eastern Germany over the last five years, Barber asserts that "democracy, like a good book, takes time."<sup>44</sup> But that is precisely the message of Sachs and others that Barber scornfully rejects. A western-style democracy, civil society, and free market were not, under anyone's scenario, going to be created quickly in Russia given the horrific condition of things after communist rule. Many serious problems would inevitably arise. While skilled at pointing out these problems, Barber does not venture to say what should have been done. Given his belief that democracy creates capitalism, perhaps Barber would have advised Russia to create a democracy first, and then develop a capitalist economy. The artificial texture of Barber's analysis emerges in such advice, for to create a democracy without private enterprise is a ludicrous proposition. Alternatively, perhaps Barber would have advised a slower, more tempered introduction of capitalism to allow the government and civil society to prepare the ramparts for the onslaught of full-scale capitalism. But governments and civil societies need wealth to sustain their health and vigor, and wealth comes from economic development, and economic development most efficiently comes from capitalism.

*B. Democracy, the Nation-State, and McWorld*

Although much of Barber's book is really about his distaste for capitalism, his claim that the post-modern form of capitalism symbolized by McWorld undermines the nation-state and thus democracy deserves separate attention. The advent of McWorld and its infotainment teleshector means, in Barber's view, that the "nation-state's days are numbered."<sup>45</sup> Since the nation-state provides the best vessel for democracy, democracy's days are likewise numbered.

---

43. *Id.* at 185.

44. *Id.* at 118.

45. *Id.* at 39.

The first problem with Barber's claim that the nation-state is in terminal condition is that such a claim ignores basic realities of contemporary international politics. The "nation-state is dying" thesis has become fashionable; but, as one leading source of analysis on current world affairs, *The Economist*, has pointed out, the nation-state remains surprisingly "durable, for all the battering it has taken from 20th-century technology."<sup>46</sup> Barber repeats the argument made by many that technology has undermined the nation-state without analyzing what is supposed to be replacing the nation-state as the fundamental organizational unit of international relations. Barber's assertion that international relations will become like shopping at a mall is a poor substitute for serious analysis of an important question. Another problem with Barber's "demise of the nation-state" thesis is that he mixes concepts too readily. I do not interpret Barber to mean that there will no longer be a United States of America or a France, but that the governments of nation-states are losing sovereignty over economics and culture. Barber does not claim that McWorld will usher in supranational entities. Rather, I think what Barber means is that sovereignty will play a lesser role in international affairs than before. The more exact question raised by Barber's book is whether it is healthy for democracy to have sovereignty decrease.

Traditional liberal thinking on international relations held that economic interdependence created the conditions needed for peace and order precisely because governments would be less powerful.<sup>47</sup> Economic interdependence was also thought to promote democracy,<sup>48</sup> further strengthening peace and limiting government. In traditional liberal thought, sovereignty needed to be reduced in its influence.

Barber rejects all the traditional liberal principles because he distrusts economic interdependence, disagrees that economic interdependence promotes democracy, and wants more government and sovereignty, not less. The trouble with Barber's stance is that it is disconnected from reality and laden with a nostalgic romanticism. In his grim portrait of McWorld, Barber never acknowledges the unique relations enjoyed by democratic states. Historically, liberal states have not waged war with each other; they have enjoyed unprecedented levels of economic interdependence, and continue to experience

---

46. *The Nation-State is Dead. Long Live the Nation-State*, *ECONOMIST*, Dec. 23, 1995–Jan. 5, 1996, at 17.

47. See ROBERT GILPIN, *THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS* 31 (1987).

48. See CROPSEY, *supra* note 31, at 95 (interpreting Smith's position to be that commerce generates freedom and free political institutions).

vigorous democratic politics. Barber believes that the relations of developed capitalist societies epitomize McWorld. Given the historical record of relations between liberal states, we should embrace McWorld rather than condemn it as wicked.

Barber myopically focuses on the infotainment telesector and makes movie and television popularity the litmus test for the future health of democracy. Sly Stallone apparently has more philosophical, political, cultural, and economic power than the shared devotion to civil and political rights, limited government, free enterprise, free trade, individual liberty, and peaceful relations forged between liberal democracies in this century. Barber seems more mesmerized by the telesector videology than do the liberal democracies he condemns to the ash heap of history. Stallone or Schwarzenegger films may be in bad taste, but they are not the horsemen of the democratic apocalypse. In reality, liberal democracies engage in much more serious and inspiring relations than Barber cares to admit.

Barber's fear of McWorld also reveals a very strong conservative streak in his thinking. He seems to yearn for yesteryear, before McDonald's, before MTV, before Macintosh. The development of technology and its subsequent globalization have moved liberal democracies out of Eden, into a world with impotent governments, disintegrating civil societies, and rampaging global markets. The concept of civil society bears so much weight in Barber's analysis that his failure to delve into it conceptually and historically leaves his conclusions hollow. He appeals to some notion of civil society that is either historical or platonic. Neither would be very helpful in addressing the future, which is what Barber wants us to do.

Barber's nostalgia is apparent in his condemnation of the infotainment telesector, which he claims is characterized by tasteless conformity and monopolistic conditions.<sup>49</sup> Most observers with an historical awareness would admit, however, that today's communication and entertainment industry exhibits more variety and competition than when the industry was dominated by a few networks and movie studios. Further, Barber's complaints about the vertical integration taking place in the media industry are more paternalistic than pro-competitive. The monopoly Barber claims is near is not a monopoly that reaps excess profits from consumers, which is the type of monopoly governments have focused on through anti-trust law. There is too much competition (and more on the way under major telecommunications reforms

---

49. BARBER, *supra* note 2, at 91.

passed by Congress in February 1996<sup>50</sup>) for a television network, telephone company, or movie studio to attempt to exact monopoly prices from consumers. Barber fears a cultural monopoly—a dumbing down of the citizenry by integrated infotainment megacorporations. His dismay at the lack of government intervention in the formation of cultural monopoly is strikingly paternalistic—the government should regulate what you watch. The people that commissioned the statues of Marx and Engels in Marx-Engelsplatz used to believe the same thing.

*C. Democracy, the Nation-State, and Jihad*

Barber's identification of a universal force he calls "Jihad" that is undermining the nation-state and democracy also fails to stand up under scrutiny. Barber's Jihad includes so many different political and cultural phenomena that it loses its analytical value. It is not very helpful to claim that the mild, peaceful provincialism present in Europe has very much at all in common with the violent, zealous Islamic fundamentalism of the Middle East. Surely the differences are greater than the similarities and should thus be the focus of attention.

Barber's claim that Jihad undermines the nation-state is also fragile. He argues that contemporary nationalist forces attack the nation-state whereas older nationalist movements sought to establish nation-states. Most of the Jihad conflicts identified by Barber seek, however, to establish nation-states from a multicultural or multinational state. The concept of the nation-state still burns brightly. Further, Barber's example of Asian governments seeking to keep out McWorld to preserve Asianness shows that the nation-state idea remains vibrant and catalyzing.

Nationalism poses a risk to democracy not because the nation-state is imperilled, but because many nationalists are not democrats. As during the Cold War, the concept of self-determination can be put to many uses antithetical to democracy. Barber does not recognize the similarities between older forms of nationalism and the forms causing concerns internationally today. The Serbian sniper in Sarajevo may listen to Madonna on his Sony

---

50. See Edmund L. Andrews, *Communications Reshaped: The Overhaul; Congress Votes to Reshape Communications Industry, Ending a 4-Year Struggle*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 2, 1996, at A1 (stating that new telecommunications legislation gives new competitive freedoms to telecommunications and media companies); Edmund L. Andrews, *Communications Bill Signed, and the Battles Begin Anew*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 9, 1996, at A1 (noting predictions about a new era of unbridled competition).

Walkman and wear Nike shoes while killing innocent people, but neither Madonna, Sony, nor Nike motivates him to pull the trigger. Passions that kill stem from deeper, more historical sources.

*D. Confederalism vs. McWorld*

The ferocity of Barber's attack on the McRevolution is striking compared to the limpness of his confederal counter-revolutionary strategy. Barber picks confederalism because he thinks it is the only realistic option (as opposed to world government and international law) and because he believes that confederalism can help create a global civil society to bolster democracy's prospects. Barber's proposed response to the McWorld-Jihad threat to democracy is very confused.

Barber clearly fails to understand how his confederal counter-revolution relates to the mechanics of international relations. First, Barber's confederal strategy must be established by and among nation-states. Barber tells us, however, that the nation-state is virtually irrelevant in today's McWorld. Barber wants to rely in his solution on the very thing that he labored so long to describe as nearly dead. If we accept Barber's depiction of the nation-state, then his confederal strategy makes no sense because the actors that would have to implement it are non-actors in McWorld. For the confederal strategy to have any chance of success, the nation-state must be more robust than Barber is apparently willing to allow because confederalism on a global scale to counteract the effects of McWorld is a formidable undertaking. If the nation-state can entertain notions of global confederalism, then it is not prostrate before McWorld, meaning McWorld is not as devastating to the nation-state as Barber claims. If the nation-state is as weak as Barber claims, any strategy to counteract McWorld pits the helpless against the powerful. Either Barber's analysis of the demise of the nation-state is exaggerated or his confederal solution is condemned to impotency by his own analysis.

Second, in order to create a global confederation, nation-states would have to agree to its parameters and set out such agreement in writing—in other words a treaty. Treaties are the very stuff of international law. Barber condemns international law, however, as useless.<sup>51</sup> Unless Barber believes that global confederation will occur spontaneously and simultaneously across the planet, he intends to achieve his end of global confederation through impotent means.

---

51. BARBER, *supra* note 2, at 16, 292.

If Barber's confederal idea has any promise, then he must supplement it with a more robust, or at least more useful notion of, international law. Otherwise, he condemns his own idea to death. The point about Barber's attitude toward international law connects directly to the previous point about his stance on the nation-state. State sovereignty is the foundation of international law.<sup>52</sup> If sovereignty is undermined by McWorld, so is international law. Barber's analysis is consistent in this respect, but his normative argument attempts to revive the very things he claims McWorld has enervated without ever explaining how such emaciated institutions of international relations will recover sufficient vigor to do battle with McWorld.

A similar criticism can be made in connection with the relationship of civil society to global confederation. Under Barber's thinking, civil society provides the place where public goods are debated and decisions relating to public goods are communicated to governments. Thus, the need for global confederalism (a public good) must be debated in civil society and forwarded onto government as a political objective. Four problems arise with this logic. First, according to Barber, McWorld has already undermined civil society's deliberative powers.<sup>53</sup> Barber again wants to rely on something for which he has already begun to eulogize. Second, the idea of global confederation is so visionary that it would require all the deliberative powers of civil society to promote. If civil society still possesses such powers, McWorld shrinks in importance, making global confederation unnecessary. Third, Barber's reliance on civil society as the conduit of policy from the deliberative citizenry assumes either that all states are democratic (which he does not assume) or that the world's democracies can lead a global confederal counter-revolution. What Barber asks liberal democracies to do is reverse the cultural assimilation and economic interdependence that constitute the pillars of strength for relations between liberal states. Alternatively, Barber is asking liberal democracies to assimilate culturally in better taste and be more discerning in their economic interdependence. Barber wants governments to intervene heavily in cultural and economic freedoms enjoyed and exercised by democratic civil societies. Fourth, Barber never confronts the question why nondemocratic states would heed the call to confederation made by liberal democracies when such nondemocratic states are already under assault from the companies and values of liberal democracies. The confederal idea sounds

---

52. IAN BROWNLIE, *PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL LAW* 287 (4th ed. 1990).

53. BARBER, *supra* note 2, at 97-98.

like an admonition for nondemocratic states to commit suicide by another means.

Even assuming Barber has a stronger view of nation-states and international law, he gives us no indication *how*, practically, the confederal solution would be adopted or work. He merely recommends reading the Articles of Confederation. *Why* states would see any wisdom in the Articles of Confederation, and *how* confederation would serve national interests is never explained. "Let's have world confederation" is a weak attempt to save democracy from extinction.

The idea that world confederation *à la* Switzerland can develop a global civil society to bolster national democracy makes a mockery out of the concept of civil society—upon which Barber places tremendous emphasis. Civil society is, if anything, local, near-by, close to home. It is the intimacy of relations in one's community that gives civil society its power. The very idea of a "global civil society" is an oxymoron. Further, the only way to try to create a global civil society is to employ heavily telecommunications, movies, television, transnational corporations, and other aspects of the infotainment telesector. Barber has placed himself in a Faustian dilemma: does he cut a deal with McWorld to promote global civil society through the infotainment telesector? Barber's solution, then, is nothing more than a sterile cry that we need to transform the videology of the infotainment telesector to one more suitable to the tastes of an academic intellectual. Such post-modern paternalism has a darker side because such a transformation could only occur through the hands of the government as Big Brother.

### III. CONCLUSION

Reading *Jihad vs. McWorld* is, in the end, a lot like eating a Big Mac. Upon initial consumption, the meal seems satisfying. Upon further digestion, however, one realizes that the initial pleasure was superficial and short-lived. The meal does little to nourish or nurture the vitality of the body and mind. In *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Barber gives us fast food political analysis and philosophy as nourishing as a Big Mac. No wonder President Clinton liked it so much.

