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978-1-107-67064-8 - The Sources of Social Power: Volume: 2: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914

Michael Mann

Excerpt

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1 Introduction

This volume continues my history of power through the “long nineteenth century,” from the Industrial Revolution to the outbreak of World War I. Focus is on five Western countries at the leading edge of power: France, Great Britain,¹ Habsburg Austria, Prussia-Germany, and the United States. My overall theory remains unchanged. Four sources of social power – ideological, economic, military, and political – fundamentally determine the structure of societies. My central questions also remain the same: What are the relations among these four power sources? Is one or more of them ultimately primary in structuring society?

The greatest social theorists gave contrary answers. Marx and Engels replied clearly and positively. In the last instance, they asserted, economic relations structure human societies. Max Weber replied more negatively, saying “no significant generalizations” can be made about the relations between what he called “the structures of social action.” I reject Marxian materialism, but can I improve on Weberian pessimism?

There is both good news and bad news. I want you to read on, so I start with the good news. This volume will make three significant generalizations concerning primacy. I state them outright now; the rest of the book will add many details, qualifications, and caveats.

1. During the eighteenth century, two sources of social power, the economic and the military, preponderated in determining Western social structure. By 1800, the “military revolution” and the rise of capitalism had transformed the West, the former providing predominantly “authoritative” power and the latter predominantly “diffused” power. Because they were so closely entwined, neither can be accorded a singular ultimate primacy.

2. Yet, into the nineteenth century, as military power was subsumed into the “modern state” and as capitalism continued to revolutionize the economy, economic and political power sources began to dominate. Capitalism and its classes, and states and nations, became the decisive

¹ I discuss only mainland Britain, excluding Ireland, which Britain ruled throughout this period. After hesitation I decided to treat the only major European colony as I treat other colonies (except for the future United States) in this volume: excluding them except as they impacted on the imperial country.

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power actors of modern times – the former still providing more diffuseness and ambiguity; the latter, most of the authoritative resolution of this ambiguity. Again, because they too were entwined, neither can be accorded a singular ultimate primacy.

3. Ideological power relations were of declining and lesser power significance during the period. Medieval Europe had been decisively structured by Christendom (as Volume I argues); in 1760, churches were still (just) revolutionizing the means of discursive communication. No comparable ideological power movement appeared later in this period, although churches kept many powers and literacy had considerable impact. The most important modern ideologies have concerned classes and nations. In terms of a distinction explained later, ideological power (except in rare revolutionary moments; see Chapters 6 and 7) was more “immanent” than “transcendent” in this period, aiding the emergence of collective actors created by capitalism, militarism, and states.

Now for the bad news, or, rather, complicating news from which we can actually construct a richer theory more appropriate to deal with the mess that constitutes real human societies:

1. The four power sources are not like billiard balls, which follow their own trajectory, changing direction as they hit each other. They “entwine,” that is, their interactions change one another’s inner shapes as well as their outward trajectories. The events discussed here – the French Revolution, British near hegemony, the emergence of nationalism or of socialism, middle-class or peasant politics, the causes and outcomes of wars, and so forth – involved the entwined development of more than one power source. I criticize “pure” and monocausal theories. Generalizations cannot culminate in a simple statement of “ultimate primacy.” The three statements I made earlier turn out to be rough and “impure” generalizations, not laws of history.

2. My rough and impure generalizations also fail to distinguish between Parsons’s (1960: 199–225) distributive and collective power; yet their histories differ. *Distributive power* is the power of actor A over actor B. For B to acquire more distributive power, A must lose some. But *collective power* is the joint power of actors A and B cooperating to exploit nature or another actor, C. In this period Western collective powers grew simply and dramatically: Commercial capitalism, then industrial capitalism, enhanced human conquest of nature; the military revolution enhanced Western powers; the modern state fostered the emergence of a new collective power actor, the nation. Though other sources of social power helped cause these developments, these three “revolutions” in collective power were primarily (and respectively) caused by economic, military, and political power relations (the

“revolution” in ideological power – the expansion of discursive literacy – was less “pure”). Distributive power changes were more complex and “impure.” The growing collective powers of states actually lessened the powers of political elites over their subjects, as “party democracies” began to displace monarchies. Nor did military or ideological elites generally enhance their distributive power over others. Yet two major and impure distributive power actors, classes and nations, did emerge – first in response to military and economic power relations, then as institutionalized by political and economic power relations. Their complex history requires more than a few sentences to summarize.

3. Classes and nation-states also emerged entwined, adding more complexity. Conventionally, they have been kept in separate compartments and viewed as opposites: Capitalism and classes are considered “economic,” national-states “political”; classes are “radical” and usually “transnational,” nations “conservative,” reducing the strength of classes. Yet they actually arose together, and this created a further unresolved problem of ultimate primacy: the extent to which social life was to be organized around, on the one hand, diffuse, market, transnational, and ultimately capitalist principles or, on the other, around authoritative, territorial, national, and statist ones. Was social organization to be transnational, national, or nationalist? Should states be authoritatively weak or strong, confederal or centralized? Were markets to be left unregulated, selectively protected, or imperially dominated? Was geopolitics to be peaceful or warlike? By 1914, no simple choice had been made – nor has one yet been made. These considerations remain the key ambivalences of modern civilization.

4. Classes and nation-states did not go unchallenged throughout the history of Western civilization. “Sectional” and “segmental” actors (rivals to classes) and transnational and “local-regional” actors (rivals to nations) endured. I treat such organizations as notable political parties, aristocratic lineages, military command hierarchies, and internal labor markets as segmental power organizations. I treat such social movements as minority (and some majority) churches, artisanal guilds, and secessionist movements as essentially local-regional alternatives to national organizations. All affected the makeup of classes and nation-states, reducing their power and their purity.

5. The cumulative effect of all these interactions – among the sources of social power, between collective and distributive power actors, between market and territory, and among classes, nations, sectional, segmental, transnational, and local-regional organizations – produced an overall complexity often exceeding the understanding of contemporaries. Their actions thus involved many mistakes, apparent accidents, and unintended consequences. These would then act back to

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change the constitution of markets, classes, nations, religions, and so forth. I attempt to theorize mistakes, accidents, and unintended consequences, but they obviously provide yet more complexity.

Thus the discussion in this volume will broadly push forward my three rough, impure generalizations while recognizing these five additional complications. They cope with the patterned mess that is human society, as must all sociological theory.

I discuss sociological theories in this and the next two chapters. Then follow five groups of narrative chapters. Chapters 4–7 cover the period of the American, French, and Industrial revolutions, which I situate amid transformations of all four sources of power. Two had begun far earlier – capitalism and the military revolution – but during the eighteenth century they helped foster ideological and political transformations, each with its own partly autonomous logic – the rise of discursive literacy and the rise of the modern state. I take all four “revolutions” seriously. From the Boston Tea Party to the Great Reform Act, from the spinning jenny to George Stephenson’s “Rocket,” from the Tennis Court Oath to the Karlsbad Decrees, from the field of Valmy to that of Waterloo – events were impure, presupposing varying combinations of the four power revolutions, carrying classes, nations, and their rivals forward in complex forms that often escaped their own control. Chapter 7 presents my overall account of power developments during this early part of the period, putting final causal emphasis on military states and commercial capitalism.

Chapters 9 and 10 focus on Prussian-Austrian rivalry in Central Europe and on the complex developing relations between class and national actors. They explain the eventual triumph there of relatively centralized nation-states over more decentralized confederal regimes. The conclusion to Chapter 10 summarizes the arguments of these two chapters and discusses whether Central European resolutions were general across Western civilization.

Chapters 11–14 analyze the rise of the modern state. I present statistics on the finances and personnel of the five states, and I disaggregate state growth into four distinct processes: size, scope, representation, and bureaucracy. The massive growth in size was military-led, occurring up to 1815, politicizing much of social life. It fostered extensive and political classes, as well as nations, at the expense of local-regional and transnational actors. Contrary to general belief, most states did not grow again until World War I. But after 1850, states – mainly responding to the industrial phase of capitalism – vastly extended their civilian scope and, quite unintentionally, this integrated the nation-state, fostered national classes, and weakened transnational and local-regional power actors.

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Most functionalist, Marxian, and neo-Weberian theories of the modern state emphasize its increasing size, scope, efficiency, and homogeneity. Yet, as states grew and then diversified, their two emerging control mechanisms – representation and bureaucracy – struggled to keep pace. Representative conflicts centered on which classes and which religious and linguistic communities should be represented and where they should be represented; that is, how centralized and national should the state be? Although the “who” has been much theorized, the “where” has not. True, there are many empirical studies of states’ rights in the United States and of nationalities in Habsburg Austria. But struggle between the centralized nation and local-regional power actors was actually universal, and the representative and national issues were always entwined. Because neither issue was resolved during this period, as states grew they became less coherent. This became glaringly evident in the disjunction between domestic and foreign policy: Classes became obsessed with domestic politics while political and military elites enjoyed privacy in foreign policy. Marxism, elite theory, and pluralist theory see states as too coherent. I apply my own “polymorphous” theory, presented in Chapter 3, to show that modern states “crystallized,” often messily, in four main forms – as capitalist, as militarist, and with differing solutions to the representative and national issues. The conclusion of Chapter 14 summarizes my theory of the rise of the modern state.

The fourth group, Chapters 15–20, deals with class movements among middle and lower classes and with the emergence of popular nations after 1870. Commercial and industrial capitalism developed class, sectional, and segmental organizations simultaneously and ambiguously. I attribute outcomes mainly to authoritative political power relations. Chapter 15 discusses the “first working class,” in early nineteenth-century Britain. Chapter 16 treats three middle-class fractions – petite bourgeoisie, professionals, and careerists – and their relations with nationalism and the nation-state. Chapters 17 and 18 describe the three-way competition for the soul of the worker among class, sectionalism, and segmentalism, which was authoritatively resolved by the varying crystallizations of modern states. Chapter 19 analyzes a similar resolution of the competition for peasants’ souls among “production classes,” “credit classes,” and “segmental sectors.” Chapter 20 presents a generalization of all this material and summarizes the relations among the sources of social power throughout the “long nineteenth century.”

Thus Chapter 7, the conclusions to Chapters 10, 11, and 14, and Chapter 20 generalize the conclusions of this volume. But there was another conclusion, a truly empirical one, to the period. Western society

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went over the top into the Great War, the most devastating conflict in history. The previous century had also culminated in a devastating sequence of wars, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, and these culminations are discussed in Chapters 8 and 21. Chapter 21, explaining the causes of World War I, is a final empirical exemplification of my general theory. It rejects explanations predominantly centered on either geopolitics or class relations. Neither can explain why the actions taken were objectively irrational and were recognized as such by the protagonists amid calmer times. The entwining of classes, nations, and their rivals produced a downward spiral of unintended domestic and geopolitical consequences too complex to be fully understood by participants or controlled by polymorphous states. It is important to learn lessons from this decline and to institutionalize power so as not to repeat it.

The rest of this chapter and the next two explain further my IEMP model of power. I repeat my advice to the reader given at the beginning of Volume I: If you find sociological theory hard going, skip to the first narrative chapter, Chapter 4. Later, it is hoped, you will return to the theory.

The IEMP model of power organization

In pursuit of our goals, we enter into power organizations with three characteristics of form and four of substance that determine the overall structure of societies:

1. As noted earlier, organization involves collective and distributive power. Most actual power relations – say, between classes or between a state and its subjects – involve both, in varying combinations.

2. Power may be extensive or intensive. *Extensive power* can organize large numbers of people over far-flung territories. *Intensive power* mobilizes a high level of commitment from participants.

3. Power may be authoritative or diffused. *Authoritative power* comprises willed commands by an actor (usually a collectivity) and conscious obedience by subordinates. It is found most typically in military and political power organizations. *Diffused power* is not directly commanded; it spreads in a relatively spontaneous, unconscious, and decentered way. People are constrained to act in definite ways, but not by command of any particular person or organization. Diffused power is found most typically in ideological and economic power organizations. A good example is market exchange in capitalism. This involves considerable constraint that is yet impersonal and often seemingly “natural.”

The most effective exercises of power combine collective and dis-

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tributive, extensive and intensive, authoritative and diffused power. That is why a single power source – say, the economy or the military – is rarely capable of determining alone the overall structure of societies. It must join with other power resources, as in the two overall dual determinations I identify throughout this period. In fact there are four substantive sources of social power: economic, ideological, military, and political.

1. *Ideological power* derives from the human need to find ultimate meaning in life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetic and ritual practices. Control of an ideology that combines ultimate meanings, values, norms, aesthetics, and rituals brings general social power. Religions provide most examples in Volume I and figure here along with secular ideologies like liberalism, socialism, and nationalism – all increasingly grappling with the meaning of class and nation.

Each power source generates distinct organizational forms. Ideological power is predominantly diffused, commanding through persuasion, a claim to “truth” and “free” participation in ritual. Its diffusion has two principal forms. It may be sociospatially “transcendent.” That is, an ideology may diffuse right through the boundaries of economic, military, and political power organizations. Human beings belonging to different states, classes, and so forth face similar problems to which an ideology offers plausible solutions. Then ideological power spreads transcendently to form a new, distinctive and powerful network of social interaction. Second, ideological power may solidify an existing power organization, developing its “immanent morale.” Transcendence is a radically autonomous form of power; immanence reproduces and strengthens existing power relations.

2. *Economic power* derives from the need to extract, transform, distribute, and consume the resources of nature. It is peculiarly powerful because it combines intensive, everyday labor cooperation with extensive circuits of the distribution, exchange, and consumption of goods. This provides a stable blend of intensive and extensive power and normally also of authoritative and diffused power (the first of each pair centers on production, the second on exchange). Volume I calls such economic power organizations “circuits of praxis,” but the term is too abstruse. I now abandon it in favor of more conventional labels for the forms of economic cooperation and conflict discussed in these volumes: classes and sectional and segmental economic organizations.

All complex societies have unequally distributed control over economic resources. Thus classes have been ubiquitous. Marx distinguished most basically between those who own or control the means of production, distribution, and exchange and those who control only their own

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labor – and we can obviously go into more detail distinguishing further classes with more particular rights over economic resources. Such classes can also be broken down into smaller, sectional actors, like a skilled trade or a profession. Classes relate to each other vertically – class A is above class B, exploiting it. Yet other groups conflict horizontally with one another. Following anthropological usage, I term such groups “segments.”² The members of a segmental group are drawn from various classes – as in a tribe, lineage, patron-client network, locality, industrial enterprise, or the like. Segments compete horizontally with each other. Classes, sections, and segments all cross-cut and weaken one another in human societies.

Volume I showed that segments and sections had hitherto usually predominated over classes. Classes were generally only “latent”: Owners, laborers, and others struggled, but usually semicovertly, intensively, confined to an everyday, local level. Most extensive struggle was between segments. But if class relations begin to predominate, we reach a second stage: “extensive” classes, sometimes “symmetric,” sometimes “asymmetric.” Asymmetric extensive classes generally arrived first: Only owners were extensively organized, whereas laborers were locked into sectional and segmental organizations. Then, in symmetric extensive class structures, both main classes become organized over a similar sociospatial area. Finally we reach the “political class,” organized to control the state. Here again we may distinguish symmetric and asymmetric (i.e., where only owners are politically organized) class structures. In his more grandiose moments Marx claimed that political, symmetric, extensive classes, and class struggle provided the motor of history. Yet, as discussed in Volume I (with the exceptions of classical Greece and early Republican Rome), classes were only becoming political and extensive just before the Industrial Revolution. In most agrarian societies a dominant class, organized extensively, “caged” subordinate latent classes inside its own segmental power organizations. This volume describes an uncompleted drift toward Marx’s full, symmetric class struggle and the linked transformation of sections and segments.

3. *Military power* is the social organization of physical force. It derives from the necessity of organized defense and the utility of aggression. Military power has both intensive and extensive aspects, for it concerns intense organization to preserve life and inflict death and can also organize many people over large sociospatial areas. Those

² Rather confusingly, American class theorists have begun to use the term “segment” to refer to a portion of a class, what Europeans term a “class fraction.” I stick to anthropological and European usage here.

who monopolize it, as military elites and castes, can wield a degree of general social power. Military organization is essentially authoritative and “concentrated-coercive.” The military provides disciplined, routinized coercion, especially in modern armies. (Chapter 12 stresses the role of military discipline in modern society.) In its impact on the broader society, military power is sociospatially dual. It provides a concentrated core in which coercion ensures positive cooperation – for example, in slave labor in earlier historic societies or in ritualized “shows of force,” as discussed in this volume. But it also provides a far larger military striking range of a more negative, terroristic form. Volume I stresses this especially in its Chapter 5, “The First Empires of Domination.” In the modern West military power differs. It has been formally monopolized and restricted by states, yet military elites have kept considerable autonomy inside states, impacting considerably on society, as we shall see.

4. *Political power* derives from the usefulness of territorial and centralized regulation. Political power means *state* power. It is essentially authoritative, commanded and willed from a center. State organization is twofold: Domestically, it is “territorially centralized”; externally, it involves geopolitics. Both have impact on social development, especially in modern times. Chapter 3 is devoted to theorizing about the modern state.

The struggle to control ideological, economic, military, and political power organizations provides the central drama of social development. Societies are structured primarily by entwined ideological, economic, military, and political power. These four are only ideal types; they do not exist in pure form. Actual power organizations mix them, as all four are necessary to social existence and to each other. Any economic organization, for example, requires some of its members to share ideological values and norms. It also needs military defense and state regulation. Thus ideological, military, and political organizations help structure economic ones, and vice versa. Societies do not contain autonomous levels or subsystems, each developing separately according to its own logic (“from the feudal to the capitalist mode of production,” “from the dynastic to the nation-state,” etc.). In major transitions the fundamental interrelations, and very identities, of organizations such as “economies” or “states” became metamorphosed. Even the very definition of “society” may change. Throughout this period the nation-state and a broader transnational Western civilization competed as basic membership units. Sociology’s master concept, “society,” kept metamorphosing between the two.

The power sources thus generate overlapping, intersecting networks of power relations with different sociospatial boundaries and dynamics;

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and their interrelations produce unanticipated, emergent consequences for power actors. My IEMP model is not one of a social system, divided into four “subsystems,” “levels,” “dimensions,” or any other of the geometric terms favored by social theorists. Rather, it forms an analytical point of entry for dealing with mess. The four power sources offer distinct, potentially powerful organizational means to humans pursuing their goals. But which means are chosen, and in which combinations, will depend on continuous interaction between what power configurations are historically given and what emerges within and among them. The sources of social power and the organizations embodying them are impure and “promiscuous.” They weave in and out of one another in a complex interplay between institutionalized and emergent, interstitial forces.

A revolutionary long century?

We have an obvious discontinuity from Volume I: Whereas it covered 10,000 years of human social experience and 5,000 years of civilized history worldwide, Volume II covers a mere 154 years and only the core area of a single civilization, Western Europe and its principal white colonial offshoot. Many broad-ranging issues discussed in Volume I are outside the scope of this volume. I cannot chart further (except in limited ways) one of its principal themes, the dialectic between empires of domination and multi-power-actor civilizations, since my civilization was merely an example of the latter. This volume replaces the macro with the micro.

There are good reasons for narrowing the scope. Western civilization now transformed the globe, and its wealth of documentation allows a finer grained narrative, linking macrostructures, group decision making, and individual human agency. I can also assay more comparative analysis. Some reviewers of the first volume assumed I opposed comparative analysis on principle. I do not. The more the cases and the closer they are in world-historical time, the more we can compare them. Provided we remember that my five cases were merely “countries” or “Powers,” and not total “societies,” they can be fruitfully compared. Most historians and sociologists also regard this period as essentially discontinuous from earlier history. They believe overall social development was ultimately determined by a singular, usually an economic, revolution. This is a simpler explanation than my IEMP model: not four sources but one fundamental source of power; not impure, interstitial entwining and metamorphosing, but a single dialectical system. Is their model of a single revolution useful?