Interrogations #7. Michael Mann: sources of social power

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1. Tamara Wattnam

Mann argues that we should take skeptical empiricism seriously, and yet he still thinks that we can emerge with a proximate methodology and perhaps a proximate answer for the issue of "ultimate primacy" (pp. 3-4). How can one convincingly justify that there is indeed something "primary" or "determining" in societies and, what is more, that it is discoverable via Mann's methodology? Mann suggests that his socio-spatial and organizational model of the sources of social power is the key to it, but I'm not convinced about why. He further claims that undergirding his analysis is a particular view of human nature which he expects us to just accept as obvious and given (p.4). I'm a bit overwhelmed by some of his grand claims, especially his claim that his history and theory of power relations is virtually synonymous with a theory of human society itself (p.1). For purposes of our discussion, I'd like to discuss how and why Mann thinks that a theory of ultimate primacy actually exists.

> **Commented [EW1]:** Mann's claim is basically that social change – the stuff of history – is in significant ways the result of human being pursuing goals, and mostly the pursuit of goals involves people acting collectively in one way or another. Once they act collective, power becomes involved, where power is understand as the capacity to do things (that is collective power) and the capacity to get other people to do things. The "primacy" for explaining social change at this level of abstraction is really a primacy of goal-directed behavior in explaining change, the efficacy of which is in term constituted above all by power (collective and distributed). I don't think he is here talking about primacy in the usual way people do – the primacy of one aspect of social interactions over others in explaining social change. That kind of primacy he rejects.

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2. Pete Ramand

By separating military and political powers, Mann makes a unique and interesting contribution to the study of the state.

An examination of the Egyptian revolution in 2014 appears to support this distinction: despite the fact that Mubarak came from a military background, and despite the fact that Egypt was often described in common parlance as a *military* dictatorship, military forces were, nevertheless, the ultimate arbiter that removed him from office. This supports the logic of Mann's argument that the military and state constitute separate (although overlapping) networks of power.

However to better understand the move made by Mann, I would like to pose the following question: Why stop at the separation of military and political power? Specifically, how should we think about other organized networks such as the police and security services? Do they not also potentially constitute a separate organized power network that is distinctive to both the military and the state? In chapter 12 Mann traces the historic separation of the roles of police and military in their functions of domestic militarism, showing how and why the police emerged as the "inward looking" organ of repression. He notes on page 404 that:

> **Commented [EW2]:** These really are part if "military power" for Mann – but these are more effectively subordinated to political power than the proper military in some situations. In the Modern Western democratic capitalist states the military has been institutionalized in such way that it is pretty effectively subordinated to political power.

> "The major nineteenth century development was the emergence of municipal, regional, and national police forces with organizational abilities paralleling the armies, though without the numbers, arsenals, or potential resort to the fourth level of violence. They were responsible not to army or parish but to broader civilian authorities."

As Mann, notes, they were not responsible to the army. But in some societies they can exercise autonomy from the state in comparable ways to the military. If we once again take the example of Egypt prior to 2011, the police and security services often undermined both the army and state authorities in an attempt to bolster their own relative power. Kandil (*The Power Triangle: Military, Security and Politics in Regime Change*, 2016) notes that in Egypt, Iran and Turkey coups leading to regime change established a division of labor, with one group of officers running government, another overseeing the

military, and a third handling security. But their interests began to vary as each group identified with its own institution. This led to conflicts between these *three* components of the regimes.

While this may not be true to the same extent in advanced capitalist societies, these examples present a complication for Mann's analysis. Mann notes that the sources of social power overlap, but are the police/security services ultimately reducible to either the state or military powers? And if so why? If, in some cases, the police are themselves an organized network with considerable autonomous power, why don't they represent an independent source of social power? I ask this question, not to provoke a narrow discussion about the police, but rather to better understand Mann's overall logic in separating Military and Political power.

3. Youbin Kang

Michael Mann often references his joint interest in Marx and Weber. However, it seems that he downplays Weber's emphasis on the relatively autonomous power of ideas. I think that Mann's division of social powers into different sources (economic, military, political, and ideological) seems to follow the trajectory of the development of political theory and philosophy, from Machiavelli to Marx, and now to those influenced by Habermas. While Mann's approach in explaining historical events through power relations is novel, I also wonder whether the opposite is true, that the actors in these historical times did not have a theoretical basis to act a certain direction or leverage a certain type of power. For example, his causal emphasis on military and economic power in the 18th century may be since some of the thoughts on the military and economic power came about during those times. In other words, how does Mann take into account the role of ideas in history?

4. Benny Witkovsky

I'm struggling to reconcile Michael Mann's decision not to focus on colonial struggles and contestation of imperial power with his claim that this period did not represent a qualitative change in distributional power (12). Wouldn't the loss of colonies in North and South America and the struggle over continued colonial projects in Africa and Asia have significant ramifications for who states, state actors and others can wield power over, and wouldn't we expect those changes abroad to have significant effects for the distributive power within states? Elsewhere Mann spends considerable time talking about how relationships between states and geopolitical dynamics shapes the nature of social power, but even there he spends less time discussing the loss of and struggle over colonies. Is he making a claim that these dynamics weren't actually that important for social power in this era? Or is this a blind-spot that calls into question broader parts of his analysis?

5. Courtney Deisch

For Mann, democracy is not the necessarily 'freer' alternative to absolutism and despotism. Mann describes the emergence of democratic and national citizenship within nation states during the early modern period as "people [becoming] trapped within national cages and so [they] sought to change the conditions within those cages" (251). For Mann, in fact, states in general act as 'caging' mechanisms, containing their citizens and confining their interests and pursuits to those which concern domestic policy and foreign policy in as far as that foreign policy might affect the specific configuration of the state itself. Mann's description of states, and specifically modern nation states, seems to presuppose

Commented [EW3]: One way of posing your question is this: for Mann the pivotal issue for ideas is the ideological power *organizations* through which ideas are propagated rather than the specific content of the ideas themselves. When he talks about transcendent and immanent ideological power he is talking about the reach of the networks of interactions through which specific ideas are being mobilized. But in every specific discussion, the content of the ideas matter as well – see his discussion of nationalism, identity, family and meaning, in various places. Without resonant content the networks could accomplish anything.

Commented [EW4]: I guess is basic claim is that the loss of the colonies in the New World and the advance of colonial projects elsewhere in this period actually didn't have much effect on distributive power within the metropolitan states – at least not as much as other forces which he discusses.

that the states are relatively stable and therefore seek only to maintain borders rather than seek expansionist policies. It is only through an assumption of stability that the metaphor of the state as cage containing citizens and orienting their concerns toward the conditions within their cages rather than questioning the mechanism itself. If the state were actively seeking expansionist policies, the citizens occupying the contested border regions (by border regions, I am not simply here referring to areas surrounding geopolitical boundaries of the state, but all contested areas resultant from expansionist policies including colonization and imperialism) would undoubtedly be concerned with the legitimacy of the state as a 'caging' mechanism. The 'caging' of nation states act not simply to consolidate attentions inward toward domestic conditions within the states, but also as a mechanism to produce 'national segments' that cross-cut classes and prevent the production of a transnational proletariat with a unifying consciousness (29). The production of a class consciousness is undermined by the emergence of nation states as "particularistic segmental networks whose building blocks [are] localities and regions, not classes." (216). What would be a solution to this 'caging' of a national state consciousness that operates simultaneously to undermine the development of a transnational and cohesive class consciousness? In Mann's conception of class, is there room to conceive of a *unified* class consciousness that transcends nations and nation states? If the nation state system –even under a democratic governance- is not freedom because it is resultant from social confinement, is freedom and consequently the potential for the emergence of a class consciousness to be sought at a transnational level? Would this transnational level simply result in the expansion of Mann's 'cage' to the social confinement of a transnational state?

> **Commented [EOW5]:** I don't think this is right. His discussion of geopolitics includes expansionist states as one of the forms that nationalism can take.

> **Commented [EOW6]:** I don't think he rules this out as a theoretical possibility. He does refer to transnational class formation as one of the theoretically possible forms. He just thinks it is extremely unlikely since this would require organizational forms that were transnational, and this would be extremely difficult to construct.

6. Kaan Jittiang

The IEMP model that Michael Mann devises seems to be a powerful instrument for the study of social power by focusing on the organizational power sources of history. It primarily helps unfold the processes of social change in the modern Western civilization. With his focus on *organizational power sources* in the books, Mann states immediately that he bypasses the conceptual literature on power that considers *power itself as a resource*. He argues, "resources are the media through which power is exercised" (p.6). So, what does Mann mean when he says that he does not treat power as a resource*?* Aren't the different organizations of power in the IEMP model a reflection of power as a resource? What are the differences between *power source* and *power as a resource*?

> **Commented [EOW7]:** I think what he means by all this is that if we understand power as a capacity to do things, then there must be something that constitutes that capacity, and that is what he called a "source" of power – it is the things which render a capacity a capacity. I don't know exactly what it means to talk about capacity as such, since qualitatively different capacities enable you to do qualitatively different things.

7. Griffin Bur

My interrogation is going to hit on a theme I've raised in several interrogations; hopefully this feels more like the fumbling adumbration of a semi-coherent perspective than a neurosis! I thought Mann's methodological reflections in the first chapter of *SSP* I were very precise and clear and in the main I agree with what he says; my main question is: **is there actually a conflict between Mann's argument about power and Marx's to the extent that Mann thinks that there is?**

Here's where I'm coming from: one of my pet ideas, laid out by other Marxians before me, is that Marx's project was not especially concerned with the division of social life into separate spheres and the subsequent attribution of causal primacy, whether proximate or "in the last instance", to "the economic sphere" (setting aside what Engels or other subsequent interpreters have said). I don't want to turn this into a discussion of what Marx did or didn't write, which isn't always very stimulating, but I will note briefly that Marx spends virtually no time in any of the three volumes of *Capital* posing or answering questions about the factors that will give us the key to social life (I completely agree with

Mann that these questions and answers are bad ones); instead his problematic seems to be an investigation into the ways that the capitalist mode of production works or doesn't work, which seems perfectly compatible with Mann. Interestingly, Mann's citations of Marxists on p. 10 are *all* Althusserians (or post-Althusserians) of one shade or another; I think that the charges that Mann lays out *are* a fair critique of that particular branch of Marxism, which is undoubtedly preoccupied with the question of the relations of social levels. But there is also a long tradition of Hegel-influenced Marxism that rejects "factor thinking", especially Plekhanov and Lukacs (who aren't obscure figures or anything). In fact, Mann's argument that "[s]ocial life does not consist of a number of realms … whose relations with one another are those of external objects" (*SSP* I, 18) seems to me to be very compatible with Plekahnov's insistence that "the 'factors' point of view is alien to dialectical materialism" (*On the Role of the Individual in History*)--it's remarkable how similar they sound on this point. And elsewhere, Mann's (very reasonable) rejection of the idea that we ought to study modes of production *because of* "the supposed strength of the human drive for material subsistence" that he attributes to "many Marxists" (p.5--no one is cited by name) sounds a lot more like Feuerbach's pun that *der Mensch ist was er ißt* ("man is what he eats") than Marx (whose materialism Marx took great pains to distinguish from his own). In fact, immediately following this remark, he launches a discussion of the emergent properties of the process of production of social life that is distinctly parallel to the similar, non-reductive discussions of the same phenomenon in the *German Ideology*.

> Anyways, on the whole, I think Mann's methodological chapter was a model of clarity when it comes to his own argument (perhaps not in his representation of others). I thought his focus on *organizations* and *networks*, not as autonomous vectors or yet more "factors" but as "moments" of social life that need to be investigated, or just as analytical lenses, was very helpful. To take just one quick example, as a former labor organizer myself, I thought his explanation of "why no revolution" (on p. 7) was a nice addition to the Gramscian variety of explanations focused on hegemony--essentially that organization is just *difficult* and cannot be taken for granted, and the working class, rather than be quiescent or indoctrinated, is more frequently "outflanked", to use his term. **But my major question remains: is there anything really incompatible with Marx, or with a Marxian approach in this insistence on the import of organizations, institutions and networks? If by "Marx" we mean not "primacy of the economic" but "a focus on the patterned reproduction of social life and the more and less effective ways that individuals or groups might try to reshape those relations", is there anything in Mann's sophisticated critique of some of the dogmas of social theory that isn't compatible with this?**

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8. Sarah Farr

I have not finished all of the assignment for this week, so it is quite possible that some of questions are answered later in the text. In the first few chapters we were assigned, I was struck by Mann's rejection of ideas like "systems," "cohesion," and "strategies." He argues that social processes are "impure," "promiscuous," "multicausal," and rejects notions of inevitability. (This leads him away from Marxian analysis and historical materialist explanations of history.) In many ways, I found this nuance—informed by empirical study—refreshing. In other ways, I felt his discussion of power networks as the primary motors of change in society implied a fair amount of strategy, cohesion, and systematic action—just that these characteristics are contained within networks and not in some societal "whole." Is his primary concern just one of scale?

Another question I have is about the forms of power he identifies. He seems to place slightly more weight on what he calls diffuse organizations of power in terms of their role in determining the structure

Commented [EOW8]: Except that Plekanov – I believe – did argue for a dialectical method in which there was a "system" with "contradictions". Mann's rejection of the idea of society as a system cuts against the grain of Hegelian Marxism and nearly all Marxists.

Commented [EOW9]: I also like Mann's conceptual menu and the idea of society as intersecting ("entwining") networks of power relations. The fact that he calls it organizational materialism does show an affinity with Marxian ways of thinking. Still, Marx does have very distilled formulas which are meant to capture the heart of the broader theory – class struggle is the motor of history; history is the judge, the proletariat is the executioner; etc. These could be taken as purely political statements for purposes of focusing energy in a socialist movement or working class movement, but they also do seem to have more theoretical standing. And when it comes to capitalism itself, his arguments for the trajectory of capitalist development and its implications for class formation an class struggle sound like economic primacy in generating the predictions or expectations of the primary tendencies. It would be hard to get out of anything in Marx the Mann accounts of the intrinsic limits to the formation of broad working class solidarities and consciousness and the general expectation that proletarian class formations will fracture in all sorts of ways (sections, segments, etc.).

Commented [EOW10]: There is lots of agency in Mann that takes place within organizations, which are themselves embedded in networks. So, people act collectively – that is why there is organization – in pursuit of goals, and they do so with variable degrees of power (from the four sources deployed by these organizations) which will depend upon the degree of cohesion within these networks, and so on. All of that is there, What there is not is a social totality in which everything fits together in a parts/whole format.

of society. His discussion of diffuse power sounded a lot like hegemonic power to me. Is there a reason he opts not to use the category of hegemony? Are there key differences between diffuse and hegemonic power? I am also intrigued by the puzzle he sets up on p. 3 of Vol 2 regarding the co-emergence of states and classes, the contradictory forms of power that organize these two "actors," and the implications that this "ambivalence" has had for the organization of society. I'm sure he will return to this topic in the last chapters, but I would like to foreground this topic for discussion.

> **Commented [EOW11]:** Diffuse power need not imply hegemony, which refers to forms of subordination that involve consent to the subordination. Diffuse power is more like what others might call structural power – it is power that cannot be commanded.

9. Kris Arsaelsson

Mann argues that industrialization lead to a qualitative "collective" power shift but not so much in terms of "distributive" power: "Many distributive power relations found in Britain in 1760 were still there in 1914 - indeed, they are still there" (p. 15). Although on the next page (p. 16) he admits that he was "perhaps selective, downplaying genuine distributive power shifts" now emphasizing a transformation for gender while restating that "distributive power was transformed less during this period than theoretical tradition suggested. Classes and nation-states did not revolutionize social stratification." Broadly speaking, the abolishment on hereditary stratification goes against the argument that capitalism did not transform distributive power, yet white men still rule (i.e. hold most of all the sources of power). Assuming that we believe this to be empirically true, that distributive power has changed remarkably little but collective power changed in a qualitative way, how does Mann's *theory* explain this? In particular: a) what are the dynamics between collective and distributive power, b) the relationship between collective and distributive powers *and* the four sources of social power, and c) the role of networks?

> **Commented [EOW12]:** I think what he is saying is that less changed than meets the eye because mostly the hereditary elite of the earlier era managed to adapt to the new conditions and remain power holders in the new era. This is a bit like the nomenklatura become the oligarchs in post-Soviet times.

10. Janaina Saad

In his chapter titled "A Theory of the Modern State" Mann suggests that the modern state is not unitary and cohesive but rather constitutes "polymorphous power networks stretching between center and territories." (p. 75) For Mann, the form of the modern state cannot be reduced, in the last instance, to any one determinant (such as capitalism). The first part of his argument outlines the particular characteristics of political institutions. He then uses a functionalist approach to simplify the various institutional forms into four main forms of state crystallizations: capitalist, representative, national, and militarist. These different functional crystallizations act in entwined, dynamic and unintended ways to determine state power. Conflict is present *within* each functional crystallization and *between* the different crystallizations. With respect to the former, Mann recognizes that the particular form of crystallization involves "head on collisions" between actors that ultimately get institutionalized. With respect to the latter, however, Mann is less assertive. According to Mann, "states do not *usually* make ultimate choices among them." (p. 77). But this does not mean that they *never* do. He acknowledges that it is methodologically challenging to theorize any ultimate relation between capitalist, representative, national and militarist crystallizations. Given such methodological challenges, we cannot make general claims about the primacy of any one crystallization over the others in *ultimately* determining state power. I agree with Mann that the state is a highly complex set of institutions and people that dynamically structure the forms of social conflict. However, as I lay out above, I think he is less successful in demonstrating that that there is no underlying primary logic to the modern state. *How can we settle Mann's claim that the state is not ultimately decided by class or any other single social determinant given the methodological challenges he lays out for actually disproving such hypothesis?*

> **Commented [EOW13]:** I think the key issue here lies in his use of the idea of "entwining". Class crystallizations in the state can only occur through their entwining with other networks of power, never on their own, and these of necessity affect the outcome in ways that cannot be disentangled.

11. Loren Peabody

I'm having a hard time pinning down whether Mann's accounts of the modern state, social power, and trajectories of historical development actually contradict the Marxian approaches we have been examining, and if so, where. Perhaps there really is no frontal disagreement since, as Erik's introduction in the syllabus mentions, Mann's approach provides more of a "conceptual menu" than a "theory." Perhaps other scholars could even make a distinctively Marxist use of his concepts, such as describing how social classes employ each of the forms of power he articulates.

Mann may not assert a general theory that specifies what historical outcomes are to be expected and what would be surprising, but he does seem to say that his account provides a unique specification of what forms of organization have been most *important* for the overall historical trajectories of the periods he examines. Even if Mann eschews claims to "ultimate" primacy, he says that he aims to improve on Weber's skepticism about being able to make any generalizations about primacy (Vol. I, p. 1, 736) and he argues that historical analysis cannot avoid making implicit claims of primacy because any account of an event or social process will necessarily foreground some factors and downplay the importance of others (Vol. I, p. 4). Does Mann provide a compliment or an alternative to the Marxian approaches we are examining?

> **Commented [EOW14]:** He gives pretty strong arguments for why solidaristic confrontation of symmetrically organized classes ("dialectical confrontation") are unlikely, and why the only circumstances in which ruling class could be defeated in a direct struggle would be if class struggle was entwined in particular ways with other forms of power.

> **Commented [EOW15]:** But this is not trans-historical or trans-contextual primacy - -this is a much more limited claim.

Below is a summary of some of the main places he appears to couch his project in terms of a fundamental divergence from Marxist theories in Chapters 1, 2 and 20 of Volume 2:

- Mann criticizes the neglect by Marxists of ideological, military, political and geopolitical power relations (p. 24)
- Mann critiques "monocausal" theories and claims to "ultimate primacy" (p. 2, 10)
- Mann suggests that sources of power are "entwined" with each other (p. 2), making it difficult to separate out an economic base
- Mann argues that Marxists over-emphasize the transition to capitalism as an explanation for overall social development (p. 10-11)
- Mann asserts that the economic transformation around 1800 may have qualitatively changed collective power but not distributive power (p., 12, 24) [however most Marxists attribute the transition to capitalism to an earlier period, which he acknowledges on p. 12]
- Mann says that the latent class structure is "of little sociological interest" (p. 26), does not define classes purely in terms of relationship to the means of production (p. 28), and describes classes as entwined with the development of other sources of social power (p. 30)
- Mann suggests that interests alone cannot "drive forward the kind of action Marx was envisioning" (p. 31)
- For Mann, societies should not be conceived as "systems" as there is no ultimately determining structure to our entire social experience (p. 736)
- Mann argues that the ideal-typical logic of capitalism cannot capture the impurity and messiness of concrete social formations and that the logic of capitalism competes with that of militarism (p. 738)

Are these exaggerations of difference, straw men, or substantive disagreements?

> **Commented [EOW16]:** Some are real disagreements, but he is a little cavaliere in mixing together criticisms of specific Marxists, criticism of Marx, and criticisms of the Marxist tradition as a whole.

12. Aaron Yarmel

Imagine a regime ("an alliance of dominant ideological, economic, and military power actors, coordinated by the rulers of the state" (Vol 2., 19)) that is contributing to oppression. Assume that there are power sources (e.g., the economic and military power sources), such that actors in the regime have

greater distributive power to the extent that they are associated with those power sources (as opposed to other ones); call these the 'currently dominant power sources.' Are there any generalizations about *which* power sources it would be best for activists (or others) to try to influence? On the one hand, successfully affecting the currently dominant power sources would plausibly have greater effects. On the other hand, doing so would be more difficult.

Commented [EOW17]: I don't think that there are any possible generalizations at this level of abstraction. There are too many other things going on which affect the forms of entwinement (to use Mann's expression) which affect the possibilities of strategy. Furthermore, Mann basically feels that the prospects of success of subordinate social forces (subordinate with respect to distributive power with respect to all of the sources of social power) really depends on things which disrupt and confuse the ruling groups. He never really suggests much space for strategy to challenge structures, unless the structures are faltering for independent reasons. "Revolutions...occur where ruling classes and regimes becomes confused by the emergence of multiple, nondialectical but entwined conflicts." (v.II. 274)

13. Kurt Kuehne

We haven't talked much about the military, either as an autonomous institution standing apart from the civil bureaucracy, as the link between the state and its dominion over territory, as the defender of the state against external existential threats, or any number of ways scholars might interpret the political-military or civil-military relationship.

Mann provocatively argues that societies are not systems: "There is no ultimately determining structure to human existence—at least none that social actors or sociological observers, situated in its midst, can discern. What we call societies are only loose aggregates of diverse, overlapping, intersecting power networks" (506). Mann is happy to declare, therefore, that the military is autonomous from the center of political power; it is another power network that "intersects" with the civil bureaucracy. **But do we accept his arguments about the development of an "autonomous, cohesive military caste"-- particularly his claim that development was to blame for the world-historical events of 1914 (438)?** Can we accurately describe the military as "autonomous," or even potentially autonomous, from the political apparatus? I don't think I buy this line of reasoning.

Commented [EOW18]: He also says that the professional military of the modern, democratic state is largely subordinated to the state, so this autonomy is in the *source* of power not necessarily in the exercise of that power.

Incidentally, I was mentally debating the separation of political and military power when—violà!—Mann writes, "Why do you separate political and military power? Critics have asked me (e.g., Runciman 1987 and Erik Wright in several friendly arguments)" (403). Magic! Erik, I would love to hear more about the substance of these debates, and how they may have evolved.

14. Samina Hossain

Mann attributes the unique crystallization of the nation to the pressures of fiscal-military crisis, which "hit states more directly and more uniformly than did commercial or industrial capitalism" (p. 219 Ch 7). The demands of waging war – including conscription and financing – also politicized the people – "they were 'caged', politicized and 'naturalized' by state fiscal exactions" (p. 224, Ch 7). These exactions led to their struggle toward representative government. "In the early period, people became trapped within national cages and so sought to change the conditions within those cages" (p. 251, Ch 7).

The industrial phase of capitalism, at the turn of the 20th century, reinforced the nation by deepening and homogenizing social interactions. "Quite unconsciously, most state activities furthered the nation as an experienced community, linking the intensive and emotional organization of family and neighborhood with more extensive and instrumental power organizations" (p. 730, Ch 20). The population became "confined within cages whose relations with other national cages were defined not by the people as a whole but first by private state and military elites, second by the nationalists" (p. 734, Ch 20)

Mann's sobering explanation of the nation, with a running motif of "cages", leads me to reason that the state is acquiring more coherence yet the author argues otherwise. "[W]hen states became the center and radii through which much of social life is regulated, they lost that systemic coherence." (p. 736 Ch

Commented [EOW19]: I think this is because state's become more complexly entwined with more heterogeneous sources of power and have to deal with complex problems which renders the structure of the state itself – its organizational structures – much more complex. That different parts of the state can have different crystallizations – some are more patriarchal than others, some more capitalist than others, etc. – is what renders the state as such less coherent.

20) His defense is that "as more of social life became politicized, so did its conflicts and its confusions" (p. 735, Ch 20). **Are you guys convinced that the state is less coherent today in spite of the nation's invasive organization of society? Do you think crystallization of the nation was as unconscious and polymorphous as the author makes it out to be?**

> **Commented [EOW20]:** I think what Mann argues is that there was a pretty unconsciouss process through which protonationalism emerged as a response to things like conscription and exactions, but that quickly as state's sought solutions to the problem generated by these process the building of the nation did become a conscious project – a conscious solution to various problems of conflict and social integration that had been triggered by the fiscal-military problems.

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15. Masoud Movahed

The first volume of Mann's *The Sources of Social Power* is a survey of the history of power in various societies—(I prefer to call them civilizations as opposed to societies)—from prehistoric times to the eve of Industrial Revolution. The opening chapter of the book, Mann informs the reader about the theoretical assumptions concerning the social dynamics of power. Mann argues that societies are not the perfect interactive systems that sociologists think of them to be; instead, four major social networks—ideological, economic, military and political—are endowed with enormous autonomy, which he considers to be the sources of power. Power, for Mann, is the "ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one's environment" (p.6). The definition is somewhat opaque, which can introduce imprecision into Mann's analysis, particularly when the discussions take up "power networks" manifested in ideological, economic, military and political power. In volume 1 of *The Sources of Social Power,* Mann devotes much attention to explicate the various forms by which power was acquired in ancient time: the means and ways by which people acquired resources, imposed control and sanctions on each other, cemented alliances and expanded communication to convey essential information. Mann also pays attention to the logistical obstacles that often caused some limitation on power expansion. For example, the limitation to administrative power set by the fact that armies of the ancient empires (i.e. Greek) could not travel more than three days on supplies that they could carry with them. Mann's offers much insights into the ways which powerholders within different networks acquired and employed the resources that they had at their disposal for the sake of power expansion.

> **Commented [EOW21]:** I don't quite see what is opaque about this general definition.

Perhaps, it would have been better if Mann would not have used the word "society" to describe the "entities" or civilizations he examines in ancient time. Mann is right to treat those entities as not "well-bounded", "self-maintaining systems", but as "overlapping and intersecting socio-spatial networks of power." By his own rule and commitment to "comparative sociology", he has to treat important ancient civilizations and empires such as Assyria, Rome and Persia—and also Chinese and Indian civilizations—as cases that could be subsumed in the same category. By omitting the ancient civilizations of the Near and Far East, Mann risks being accused of "Eurocentric" in his analysis since he only focuses on the civilizations that grew in the West.

> **Commented [EOW22]:** This is only a flaw if it were the case that the IEMP model of entwined forms of socio-spatial power networks would not work in other civilizations.

Mann's investigation of ancient civilization is not much concerned to distinguish various types of "society," but "power." Volume 2 of *The Social Source of Power* contains some important clarifications and reformulations of the IEMP model. If volume 1 chronicled the "history of power" across seven civilizations, volume 2 is study of power during "the rise of classes and nation-states." The book can be divided into 3 broad sections. In the first (chapters 2-7), Mann discusses class struggle and the modern state. His cases for examination are, on the one hand, the British during and after the Industrial Revolution, and the other hand, the French and American Revolutions. In the second section (chapters 11-12), Mann explains the shift of military and industrial hegemony to Central Europe through comparison of the "authoritarian national capitalism" in Prussia and the "confederal multinational empire" in Austria. In the third section (chapters 20), Mann argues that the Western societies from the mid-nineteenth century were mainly based and structured by classes and the nation-states and the complex

"intertwining" between them, and that the World War I was instigated—at least partly—by the interaction various social forces, classes, statesman, militaries and national parties, etc.

Right at the outset of chapter 20, Mann argues that capitalism increased all countries' distributive and collective power relations (p.726). It is true that capitalism generated societies that vastly stratified, and that property relations under capitalism inherently generates antagonistic class relations. It is also true that capitalism, as it matured, generated a whole gamut of classes in capitalist societies with various levels of access to economic resources and opportunities to advance life chances. But if Mann suggests that transforming distributive power means actually empowering classes other than the capitalist class, I do not think capitalism has done that. Indeed, capitalism has increased the collective power of the capital, but has done nothing to *distribute* this power amongst classes other than capital. So this is an area I would like to have some discussion on in class.

Commented [EOW23]: You are providing much more summary of the contents of the book than is needed for the task at hand.

Commented [EOW24]: No, this is NOT what he says. He writes: "Though both capitalism and industrialism vastly increased collective powers, distributive powers – social stratification – were **less** altered."

Commented [EOW25]: He never says this. Indeed, his claim that distributive power relations didn't change all that much suggests that stratification – power to command others – remained very strong.

Commented [EOW26]: You are not understanding the meaning of "collective power" versus "distributive power": collective power is the power to do things; distributed power is the power over others. The collective economic power increases with industrialization because industrial economies can transform nature much more effectively than pre-industrial economies (that is basically a forces of production issue, understood to also include organizational sources of productivity rather than just narrowly defined technology). Distributive power is domination of one class over another.