

Michael Mann.**Fascists.**

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Michael Mann is arguably the best-known British comparative historical sociologist of our times. In his most recent book, *Fascists*, he makes important new contributions to a topic studied by generations of scholars. Specifically, he focuses on the four sources of social power analyzed in his *The Sources of Social Power*, with a view to developing a more general explanation of the rise of fascists, while leaving the discussion of their worst deeds for a forthcoming volume, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*.

The critical review of existing theories and the introduction of Mann's analytical innovations, which open the book, are followed by case studies of fascist movements and "families" of rightist authoritarians in Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Spain. Mann engages in a complex comparison of trajectories, single country interregional comparisons, and analyses of phases of movement developments. Immersing himself in the substantive literature on each case, he offers solutions to puzzles found in each. He goes on to suggest answers to some puzzles of comparative significance, such as the tendency of ruling classes to "reach for the gun" — that is, to support the authoritarian suppression of the political left — even in cases where the danger of a communist revolution is practically non-existent.

Arguably, the most original contribution of the book is the identification of "core" fascist constituencies. In a series of six case studies, Mann identifies the nation-statist constituency (soldiers, veterans, civil servants, teachers, ethnic majority group members living in disputed territories) as the usual block of supporters of fascist movements. While several researchers have already noted the salience of these groups (for example, Sugar 1971: 150-3), Mann expands upon previous studies to show the prevalence of the nation-statist constituency in all six of his cases. Further, he offers an analytically sophisticated and empirically supported explanation for the appeal of the fascist message to its core constituency. He also convincingly discredits the old thesis that the "lower middle class" was the social base of fascism. And he shows that although fascists have genuinely attempted to "transcend" the class struggle, they repeatedly imposed pro-capitalist "solutions" after the capture of power.

As one might expect, Mann's book bridges the gap between history and sociology: it offers sociological insights to historians and a more comprehensive understanding of history to sociologists. Political sociologists might be surprised to discover that historical researchers (Hagtvet 1980: 68) have abandoned the "mass society" thesis of the rise of fascism and have demonstrated that the social basis of the Nazi Party in Germany was not atomized individuals in search of a replacement father figure. Rather, the Nazis captured and mobilized "strong, but evil" civil society, mostly comprised of small town, Protestant, middle-class community associations. By and large, this major finding is ignored by political sociologists and political scientists (such as Putnam 1993), who assume that strong civil engagement of citizens is the institutional basis of a working democracy. Hagtvet's findings and Mann's theoretical elaboration of the issue call into question such overly optimistic evaluations of the role of civil society.

Political historians will appreciate Mann's attempt to incorporate analysis of the political mobilization of a variety of collective identities and not just appeals to class and nation into an explanation of the rise of fascists. Incorporation of more recent sociological insights into historians' research projects might produce a more nuanced understanding of fascism. While Mann opens up this path by providing some basic insights, he almost exclusively uses secondary sources. Thus, a full exploration of primary sources based on recent developments in sociological theory remains to be done.

Some sections of the book are remarkably well written. The "Sociology of Fascist Movement" chapter is pure pleasure to read. Teachers of research methods, historical sociology, or political sociology courses might want to use this and the next chapter as exemplary material on the comparative historical method.

In my opinion, this fine book has a few limitations. For one, the importance of international security relations for the "authoritarian turn" of the conservative right and for the ability of fascists to capture power is clear in several case studies, but not in the chapters on general theoretical explanations. For example, the Romanian political elites were easily frightened by the revolutionary left and ready to "reach for the gun," while British conservatives remained committed to democracy. Perhaps the difference had little to do with the strength of the internal far left (which was politically insignificant in both cases), and more with the level of military vulnerability to Soviet invasion. The fact that political elites of Northwestern Europe did not opt for the authoritarian right's response to the "Red Scare," while elites of virtually all countries bordering the USSR eventually did so, might have something to do with the fact that Northwestern Europe remained inaccessible to Red Army tanks throughout this period. As we can see in our own age's open-ended "war against terror," a sense of looming external military threat can easily become a pretext for restricting internal dissent.

Furthermore, Mann's own case studies show that the international context was of decisive importance for the ability of fascist movements in small countries to come to power. Despite strong popular support for the Legion of Archangel Michael in Romania and the Arrow Cross in Hungary, these fascist movements were unable to capture power, because the German government preferred to support the local right-wing military dictatorships. Moreover, the Austrian Nazis were essentially brought to power by German tanks, and it is debatable whether Franco's forces would have won the Spanish civil war without the generous support of Germany and Italy. Smaller European countries were vulnerable to the influences of the greater powers in this period (and not just in this period), and fascists could only overwhelm conservative authoritarians with the support of a major power.

One has to wonder about some sections of Mann's comparative chapter on interwar Europe, as well. He contrasts the Northwestern "democratic block" of European countries with the Eastern and Southern "authoritarian block. A number of countries are assigned to a "frontier swing zone" that saw "the most prolonged struggle between democracy and authoritarianism" (41). Historians may be surprised to learn that Czechoslovakia is assigned to this residual category, while Ireland is in the "democratic block," despite its bloody struggle for independence and the ensuing violence. In a later section (50), the residual category disappears, and countries are now assigned either to the "democratic" or "authoritarian" block. Surprisingly, some non-European countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the US) are introduced into the "democratic block," and the statistical data on their socio-economic characteristics are included in computations of various "democratic averages" (50). Interestingly, no data are introduced on either authoritarian or democratic independent countries of, say, Latin America.

Finally, most non-European countries are excluded from later comparisons, while the US is kept in (88). Mann might want to think a bit more carefully about his criteria for inclusion of cases and development of typologies in this chapter.

While Mann's knowledge of historical record is usually nothing short of impressive, some of his generalizations of the differences between the "two Europes" are problematic. He contrasts Northwestern "ethnic blindness" with ethnic conflicts of Eastern Europe (74). He explains that "English, Welsh, and Scottish men of property... rarely organized along ethnic lines" (390); interestingly, no word is said about Irish Catholic and Protestant men (and women), with or without property. We are told that France, unlike Germany, had settled territories and few ethnic disputes, so "the French disputed instead what kind of state would fill this territory" (83). Again, no mention is made of, for example, the Corsicans, some of whom might object to these generalizations. Finally, we hear nothing about the ethnic power sharing or entrenchment of minority rights in Switzerland, which can hardly be described as "ethnic blindness." While most historians would almost certainly agree that in the interwar period, ethnic issues were considerably more politicized in Eastern than in Northwestern Europe, to label all of the Northwest as "ethnically blind" seems as an unwarranted homogenization and an overstatement of the differences between the "two Europes."

Still, I find these to be relatively minor problems. Michael Mann has produced a sophisticated work that provides new insights into the most horrific ideology and movement of the twentieth century. Comparative historical sociologists, political sociologists, political scientists, and historians who specialize in twentieth-century Europe will benefit from reading this important and captivating book.

References

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