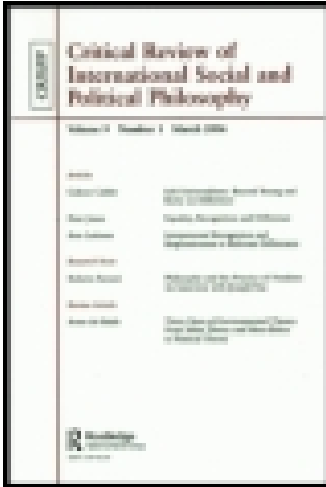


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Fascism, Ethnic Cleansing, and the 'New Militarism': Assessing the Recent Historical Sociology of Michael Mann

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Fascism, Ethnic Cleansing, and the ‘New Militarism’: Assessing the Recent Historical Sociology of Michael Mann

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ABSTRACT *For over 30 years, Michael Mann has been engaged in a project of impressive span and erudition: a historical sociology of power from ancient civilizations to the modern era. This essay examines Mann’s recent contributions to this enterprise, namely, two major books on fascism and ethnic cleansing, and a third text devoted to the putative ‘militarist’ security policy of the United States. The review’s argument is that, for all Mann’s learning, his historical sociology of fascism is over-generalized and his concept of democracy (key to his discussion of ethnic cleansing) is too vague. Mann’s polemic against the current Bush administration is also found wanting, principally for its moral evasions. The essay concludes with a reminder of the hard choices that responsible politicians, as distinct from academics free of political responsibility, are compelled to make.*

KEY WORDS: Bush administration, ethnic cleansing, militarism, fascism

Introduction

What modern political experience, aside from the Bolshevik experiment, is more important to fathom than fascism or more urgent to consider than ethnic conflict? The latter alone took more than 70 million lives in the twentieth century. And who, among our contemporaries, is better placed to guide us in this perplexing enquiry than Michael Mann, the native Briton who since 1987 has made UCLA his academic home? For over 30 years, Mann has been engaged in a Herculean effort to map the ‘sources of social power’. Dividing power into a matrix of ideological, economic, military and political loci and organizations has enabled Mann to generate a range of

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concepts, distinctions and theories of considerable acumen and scope. Two volumes of this enterprise in historical sociology, tracing diverse power relations from antiquity to the outbreak of the First World War, have already appeared (Mann 1986, 1993). A third, bringing us up to date, and entitled 'Globalizations', remains in gestation. Originally, it was to contain a single chapter devoted to fascism and ethnic cleansing. But as Mann worked through the material he concluded that something far more expansive and detailed was required. The product of those considerations is *Fascists* and *The Dark Side of Democracy*. Both consider the structures, processes and agents of social evil. Serious and scholarly, they will be obligatory reference points for all who want to grasp the terrible subjects they investigate. They are also marred by conceptual oddities and elisions, as I will show.

Central to the books' narrative is the proposal that we apply Max Weber's methodological injunction to understand social actors. A platitude, you say. It is only a platitude until one tries to practice it, replies Mann. Eschew caricature, see the world as agents see it, reconstruct the experiences and institutions which made their conduct plausible and, from their standpoint, moral. Then consider if under similar circumstances you would have acted any differently. Such an approach requires a disciplined detachment that is rare even among ethnographers. Yet not even Mann is able to practice it rigorously. Hence, in contrast to his measured analysis of fascists and ethnic cleansers, Mann has no desire to extend that stance, in *Incoherent Empire*, to the agents of modern American foreign and security policy. Hitler's executioners are to be meticulously comprehended. President George W. Bush and his team are to be sardonically lampooned. Mann claims that his study of America's 'new militarism' is that of a scholar who avoids 'high moral rhetoric' (Mann 2003: vii, 12). Yet that is difficult to square with his portrayal of Bush junior as a 'chicken hawk' and 'desk killer' (*ibid.*: 4), or the UN as a 'lap-dog' (*ibid.*: 84). Equally, while *Fascists* and *Dark Side* are replete with crisp, mordant formulations intended to jolt the reader out of complacency – 'fascism was a movement of high ideals', 'civil society can be evil', 'there are no virtuous peoples' – *Incoherent Empire* patronizes with its labored exclamation marks and descent into banality. 'Research ... shows', says Mann, 'that people in other countries do not receive American cultural messages passively' (*ibid.*: 104). Few educated people can ever have imagined otherwise.

The Nature of Fascism

Fascists is a study of the rise of fascist movements in Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania and Spain. Germany receives most attention. The book's methodological commitment to take fascist ideas seriously obliges the reader to treat fascism not as an atavistic, irrational anomaly, but as a modern phenomenon that exaggerated 'the central political icon of our time, the nation-state' (Mann 2004: 1). Fascism offered plausible solutions to people who abhorred class conflict and who craved social order. It provided opportunities for revenge, ingratiation and material advancement. It thrived in dense networks of civil society. It was idealistic and activist. Misanthropists and misfits constituted only a fraction of fascist converts. The majority

consisted of youth of all classes, the artistic *avant garde* (for instance, the Futurists), the educated, and the scientifically curious. Fascism was attractive to academics and professionals. It drew support from all classes. In today's tendentious language, fascism would be called 'progressive'. Yet while endemic in various degrees throughout Europe from the 1920s to the late 1930s, fascism was successful in capturing state power only in countries bereft of entrenched liberal-democratic parliamentary institutions. Countries in northwest Europe with a history of channeling class conflict into routinized forms of adjudication and compromise did not succumb to fascism.

Taking fascist ideas seriously does not mean reducing fascism to ideas. 'We must define fascism in its own terms, but to its values we must add its program, actions, and organizations' (*ibid.*: 12). We must disaggregate fascism into its core constituencies. But first fascism must be defined. Mann proposes five related ingredients. I mention them all because they are relevant to the criticisms I offer later. Fascism was an extreme form of nationalism. With a meager tolerance of cultural and political diversity, fascists gravitated towards an organic rather than a civic view of the nation. They saw themselves as the harbingers of a nation reborn, pure, martial and manly. Second, fascists were enthusiasts of the supreme state and the leadership principle; both were to be instruments of the people's spiritual regeneration. Third, fascist 'nation-statism' promised to transcend class conflict, knock heads together, and reintegrate divisive interest groups into corporatist institutions. The corollary of these three previous ingredients was, fourth, a commitment to purge the social body of impurities. Those who opposed fascism were 'enemies' to be ruthlessly cleansed. Foes might be political or ethnic or both. Coercion against political enemies has evident limits: people can always surrender, change their political identity and assimilate. But ethnicity, being typically an ascribed status, is more difficult to shed. And where it stands as the symbol of all that is degenerate and demonic it is a brazen insult to the organic nation. It cannot be tolerated. It must be destroyed.

Finally, central to fascism is the culture of paramilitarism. Mann puts great store on it both as a value for fascists themselves and as a mode of social organization. Its capacity to project power from the street was what decisively distinguished fascism from military dictatorships and monarchical authoritarianism. Paramilitaries provided young men with a home (Mann says 'a cage'), comradeship, nourishment, alcohol, authority, the excitement of violence, in other words, an identity. Paramilitaries were simultaneously a fascist agency of socialization, a means of intimidation, an advertisement of fascist élan, an assertion of autonomy from established elites, and a weapon in the electoral struggle. In sum, 'fascism is the pursuit of a transcendent and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism' (*ibid.*: 13).

Three core constituencies – favoring paramilitarism, transcendence and nation-statism respectively – were the heavy fuel of fascist locomotion. Paramilitaries recruited 'two successive generations of young men, coming of age between World War I and the late 1930s. Their youth and idealism meant that fascist values were proclaimed as being distinctively "modern" and "moral"' (*ibid.*: 26). The Italian *squadristi*, the Austrian *Heimwehr*, the German *Stahlhelm*, SA and others, were staffed by many army veterans with a liking for combat. But the paramilitaries were

themselves fertile soil for legitimated brutality. Their rituals helped inure men to, and toughen them up for, ethnic cleansing (*ibid.*: 173). Constituencies favoring transcendence came from all classes – fascism was not a petty bourgeois movement – but had a sectoral bias. Public sector workers and professionals such as lawyers, teachers, civil servants, doctors and the police – people, that is, away from the heartland of class conflict in urban heavy industry or manufacture – were disproportionately attracted to fascism. Finally, constituencies favoring nation-statism showed a distinctive religious bent and geographical orientation. Protestant evangelicals in Germany, the Orthodox faithful in Romania, Catholics in Austria all tended to support the fascist cause. So, too, did people from European border regions and ‘lost territories’, a point to which I return in the next section.

Mann sees fascism in evolutionary terms. It is, he says, a development of tendencies already extant in central and southern Europe. The states mostly likely to breed it were already internally conflicted before fascism’s rise. If the northwestern European states were ‘unitary, accustomed to parliamentary sovereignty, experienced in handling conflict between classes, religious communities, and regions’, the states from which fascism sprang were *dual* (*ibid.*: 72–73). Parliament and executive each shared a portion of sovereignty but were also at loggerheads. Fascism was not principally a crisis of liberalism but of conservatism, parasitic on the inability of elites in dual states to make the painful transition from notable to mass representative parties. The fragmentation and paralysis of these elites ‘opened the door to fascism’ (*ibid.*: 77, 364).

This summary fails to do justice to Mann’s many qualifications, side arguments, and illuminating digressions. The richness of his data cannot be adequately distilled in a review of this kind. The same applies, a fortiori, to *Dark Side*, which I tackle later. But the student of fascism is likely to be perturbed by a number of related problems with Mann’s analysis.

To begin with, the definition is pitched at too general a level; it is only this that allows Mann to put such divergent national cases into one box. Notably, as he acknowledges, Italian fascism was much more class based than National Socialism (i.e. less transcendent), took practically no interest in contesting electoral politics (which were rendered unnecessary by the March on Rome in 1922), and remained a splintered state in which Mussolini had to share power with the monarchy, a traditional bureaucracy and the Vatican (*ibid.*: 134). National Socialism, too, was never monolithic. But this was not because it shared power with non-Nazis but because of its own multiple and fluid organization: the revolutionary dynamics of the movement reverberated within the regime. Mussolini was eventually ejected from office by internal political rivals. Hitler and his regime were broken by Allied ferocity. Fascist Italy was not radically committed to the elimination of Jews; without German inducement and pressure such cleaning might have been half-hearted, which in many practical circumstances it was. Finally, to say that fascism ‘cleansed’ Italy of fascism’s political enemies is to say no more than it did what all dictatorships do: it destroyed those who threatened it. That is not distinctively fascist.

Why should the deviation of Italian fascism from German National Socialism be a problem? Because Italy’s peculiarities are concealed by the overarching breadth of

Mann's definition. And why is that a problem? Among other things because Mann maintains that fascism was 'made in Italy', that 'as a mass movement Italian fascism was the pristine case' (*ibid.*: 93). But if Italian fascism was pristine, its distinctive characteristics should surely be given greater salience in the definition Mann provides. Instead these characteristics are treated as if they are marginal or derivative.

Things get more puzzling still when Mann examines the other fascist cases. An ideal type, if that is what his definition of fascism amounts to, is useful to the degree to which it highlights anomalies. Yet if the irregularities become too plentiful a point is reached when one wonders whether the model itself is aberrant. Consider Spain. Spain was neutral in the First World War. It 'had few discharged young male veterans and the paramilitary ideals they espoused. Military statism remained conservative, top-down even when modernized, unaffected by popular paramilitarism or fascism' (*ibid.*: 301). Spain's borders were not contested, nor did it harbor territorial revisionists or infuriated refugees (*ibid.*: 302). Spanish nationalism was inward looking rather than expansionist. It was not an ethnic cleanser. The Spanish state was more reactionary than modernist. It is not obvious to me that such a distinctive set of characteristics are usefully seen within the framework of Mann's understanding of fascism.

The problem is compounded once we return to Germany. Scholarly debate on National Socialism is divided among those who view Nazi Germany as *sui generis*, as essentially similar to Bolshevism (the totalitarianism thesis), or as part of the family of fascisms (Mann's view). Perhaps Mann is correct. But the more one sees fascism as generic, the more difficult it becomes to explain the radicalism of National Socialism: its extreme bellicosity, its movement-state, and, most of all, the scale, intensity and duration of its murderous ethnic cleansing. Such cleansing was integral to National Socialism, not simply one of its elements. It became a priority and an obsession. That suggests not a species of fascism but a political genus in its own right.¹

Democracy and Ethnic Cleansing

If *Fascism* is largely confined to the analysis of social movements before their seizure of state power, *Dark Side* broadens the investigation to encompass both movements and regimes. Ethnic cleansing, Mann observes, is of many kinds. Segregation, absorption by intimidation, voluntary assimilation are all proven historical possibilities. Yet *Dark Side* is principally concerned with cleansing that turns murderous. Again 'fascism' in the shape of the Nazi state takes center stage. But this time Mann's considerations encompass older and newer species of ethnic cleansing in Spain, America, Australia, Armenia, Yugoslavia and Rwanda. A penultimate chapter on India and Indonesia examines cases in which riots and pogroms remain below a threshold of mass murder, while Mann's concluding remarks assess the likelihood of ethnic cleansing in the twenty-first century. As he shows, it is proceeding apace but now mainly in the South. Sandwiched between Mann's case studies of ethnic cleansing and his counterfactual examples is his investigation of 'Communist Cleansing'

(Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot). This is designed to show that communist terror was designed for purposes not of 'ethnicide' but 'classicide' (the extermination of class 'enemies' such as kulaks) and 'politicide' (the elimination of the leadership stratum of real or assumed political rivals).

Mann's investigation is structured around a set of linked causal theses, a number of which are subdivided. These in turn are framed by his contention that ethnic cleansing is largely a 'modern' phenomenon, especially prominent in democratizing states. Massacres, the leveling of cities and the extermination of their inhabitants are, of course, ubiquitous all the way back to antiquity. But in an age of multicultural empires in which dynastic rulers and courts saw the common folk as rabble, or as a qualitatively different human type, it was unthinkable to speak on behalf of them. Subjects existed to obey, build roads and fortifications, work in fields or workshops, and to produce a surplus. To cleanse a territory of its inhabitants, as distinct from destroying or assimilating its aristocratic class, would have negated its tributary value.

A number of theses and sub-theses follow. Ethnic hatred arises where 'ethnicity trumps class as the main form of social stratification' (Mann 2005: 5). Murderous cleansing occurs as part of a process. A 'danger zone' is reached when at least two movements, boasting a venerable past, and occupying the same territory, lay claim to a separate state. The more plausible the prospect of success, the more intransigent each group becomes. The 'brink' of murderous cleansing is reached either when the weaker group refuses to submit and, instead, believes that outside aid will bolster it (the Yugoslav, Rwandan, Kashmiri and Chechen cases are adduced as examples); or when the stronger camp is so convinced of its omnipotence that it seeks to force through its cleansing project convinced that it will succeed (e.g. North American and Australian colonial settlers.) Murderous cleansing thus arises from a dynamic, an interaction, between at least two groups. 'One or both sides must first decide to fight rather than conciliate or manipulate.' Finally, 'going over the brink' into murderous cleansing proper occurs 'where the state exercising sovereignty over the contested territory has been factionalized and radicalized amid an unstable geopolitical environment that usually leads to war' (*ibid.*: 7). The perpetrators of murderous cleansing comprise elites (typically of the party-state), militant paramilitaries and core constituencies of mass 'though not majority popular support' (*ibid.*: 8).

One controversial but convincing argument is that murderous cleansing is only rarely the original, animating intention of those who later go on to commit it. Typically, such cleansing is an action of last resort – an escalatory, desperate Plan C, after Plan A (conciliation or repression) and Plan B (increasing repression) fail. Mann is aware that such a view may appear heartless to those, especially victims, who stress premeditation. His reply is that social causation is seldom linear, that unintended consequences and contingencies invariably intervene, and that none of this denies deliberation. *Once* murderous cleansing begins it is methodical and calculated.

Dark Side's many case studies are a store of disquieting information. Along the way Mann contributes to a number of scholarly debates. For instance, while

mapping out the range of killer motives – ideology, bigotry, careerism, materialism, comradeship among others – Mann disputes the modernist thesis that ethnic cleansing is a product of instrumental rationality, the cult of the machine, and administrative nonchalance. That is an illusion he says: extermination was cruel, not dispassionate, bloody, not bureaucratic or technocratic. Nor was scientific sophistication a precondition of its success. ‘We see ... in Rwanda that the quickest genocide – over half a million in 12 weeks – came mainly with machetes and hoes. Each group of perpetrators used the highest level of modernity and technology available to it.’

But the part of the book which has attracted most attention, rightly, concerns Mann’s research on Nazi Germany. Collecting the biggest sample ever assembled of Nazi war criminals convicted of murderous cleansing – 1,581 of them in all – Mann shows that individuals from border regions or ‘lost territories’ are significantly over-represented: notably, Alsatian Germans and ethnic Germans from Poland and other eastern areas. Many had been homeless or ended up in a refugee camps. They were embittered and ideological. From this circumstance Mann plausibly infers that anti-Semitism was part of a broader ethnic imperial revisionism by people who considered themselves to be the real victims. Such *grossdeutsch* revisionism was violently anti-Slav and anti-Russian. Jews became symbols of a deeper revulsion, tokens of a wider struggle. Like Nazis in general, perpetrator biographies show a sectoral bias, concentrating in professional, public, state-funded occupations. Mann’s data also show that perpetrators typically had a Nazi career. These were not ‘ordinary men’ but people who since the First World War had taken an active part in street-fighting, police duties, and Germany’s own euthanasia program. Many were ‘old Nazis’, having joined the party early. Before that, 30 per cent had been members of the paramilitary *Freikorps*.

Where the book falters is in its starkly under-theorized notion of democracy, the term in the title that grabs our attention. I will concentrate the rest of my discussion on this problem because it seems to me the most serious flaw of the book. It is not, however, the only oddity. As Mann frankly acknowledges, Germany’s murderous cleansing of Jews does not fit at least three of his key propositions even though it was the greatest cleanser of them all. At 0.76 per cent of the German population in the 1930s, Jews were no material threat to Germany’s borders. (Mann says that their putative link to Bolshevism helped others see them as a threat.) Nor could German Jews call on neighboring states to help them in a separatist project they never had. Moreover, Hitler appears by at least the mid 1920s onwards to have resolved on a determined plan to rid Germany of Jews, so that extermination, even if escalatory, was latent in the founding ambition.

Here is the crux of what Mann has to say about democracy:

Democracy means rule by the people. But in modern times *the people* has come to mean two things. The first is what the Greeks meant by their word *demos*. This means the ordinary people, the mass of the population. So democracy is rule by the ordinary people, the masses. But in our civilization the people also

means ‘nation’ or another Greek term, *ethnos*, an ethnic group – a people that shares a common culture and sense of heritage, distinct from other peoples. But if the people is to rule its own nation-state, and if the people is defined in ethnic terms, then its ethnic unity may outweigh the kind of citizenship diversity that is central to democracy. (*ibid.*: 3)

Ethnic cleansing emerged, continues Mann, when ‘the ideal of the people began to entwine the *demos* with the *ethnos*, generating organic conceptions of the nation and the state that encouraged the cleansing of minorities’ (*ibid.*). ‘Democracy has always carried with it the possibility that the majority might tyrannize minorities’ (*ibid.*: 2). The ‘democratizing ideal’ becomes lethal when nations come to be perceived not as intrinsically stratified and plural, but as unitary, integral and organic, and where states are perceived to be servants of the nation, ‘bearers of a moral project’. Then majorities feel entitled to liquidate minorities. Mann endorses Bell-Fialkoff: “the real culprits are the ideals of freedom, self-determination, and representative democracy”. Democratization has its dark side’ (*ibid.*: 69).

Mann’s characterization of ‘democracy’ generates a series of puzzles that ramify throughout the book. For one thing, he has said above that citizenship diversity – more precisely, diversity under a common citizenship status – is ‘central’ to democracy. In that case, it is hard to see how murderous ethnic cleansing is its dark side. It must be something else because ethnic cleansing and citizenship diversity are logically incompatible. (Mann states that once murderous ethnic cleansing is underway democracy is no longer operative.) For another, to say that ‘the real culprits are the ideals of freedom, self-determination, and representative democracy’ is to offer a strangulated construction of these terms. Ideals are generic. If I am committed to the ideal of self-determination I am committed to its existence tout court. If I believe in the ideal of representation, I am supposing that representation does not apply solely to me. The opposite construction is more likely – that fantasies of exclusion, monopoly and closure are at the heart of the cleansing project. Ethnic cleansing is the attempt by one ethnic group to monopolize a particular geographical and political space. It is an exercise in extreme domination where one group considers itself coterminous with the territory over which it rules or over which it aspires to rule.

Mann points out that many cases of murderous ethnic cleansing unfold from a context of elections, mass rallies and mass communication. He talks about ‘the bottom’, demagogic and populist rhetoric, parties contesting and winning elections, popular and majority support. But, at best, this suggests that democracy may act as a backdrop or incubator for leaders and movements that go on to cleanse in a post-democratic period, hardly a strong thesis. Mann’s tendency to equate mass support or collective initiatives or populist rhetoric with democracy is also confusing because all of these existed long before the modern age. The term populist, for instance, derives from the Latin word *popularis*. Its exemplar after the Gracchi brothers was Julius Caesar. Caesar was inspirational for Rome’s lower orders because of his extravagant largesse, his cutting oratorical attacks on the senatorial oligarchy, and his ability to deliver land and booty to his mostly rustic plebeian

army. Republican Rome also had elections, competition to win such public offices as the tribunate, and fierce rivalry among competing patron–client networks. But Caesar was no democrat and Rome no democracy, a term that during the Republic conjured up fearful images of mob rule.

What is the *causal weight* Mann attributes to ‘democracy’ in murderous cleansing? And how might one disaggregate it from all the other causes? One is never sure. Mann might have retrieved (as he does in Mann 2004: 71) Robert Dahl’s distinction between ‘participation’ (involvement in government, centered on the franchise) and ‘contestation’ (party competition for executive power which is characterized not only by free elections but rules of the game that protect the loser from being politically extinguished by the victor.)² Evidently, contestation *in this sense* is absent in cases of murderous cleansing. Yet to finesse his argument Mann makes the following claim: countries on the path to cleansing undergo a period of ‘democratization’, or ‘perverted democratization’ (Mann 2005: 176). Or, to use a different formulation, that ‘murderous ethnic cleansing is the dark side of the would-be democratic state’ (*ibid.*: 501). Yet without greater analytical precision that argument is question-begging. When we say that a country is democratizing, we are trading on an unspoken, teleological assumption: that the country concerned is on a recognizable trajectory, recognizable, that is, from the standpoint of a mature, accomplished democracy. To put it differently, the country is in ‘transition’ from authoritarianism towards democracy. But is it? One can never be sure because it quickly falls prey to murderous ethnic cleansing, a process that strikes at the heart of citizenship plurality. It might just as well be in transition to another mode of authoritarianism, what Thomas Carothers calls the ‘grey zone’.³ The mobilization of collective enthusiasms and energies is by no means a democratic monopoly; that is why modern political writers have coined such terms as competitive authoritarianism or electoral authoritarianism.⁴ Besides, in the modern cases Mann examines – Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Nazi Germany, Armenia – it is war, invasion and geopolitical rivalry that appear to be the major causes of cleansing. Mann emphasizes these factors, particularly towards the end of the book when he argues that disputes over sovereignty are fundamental. That makes considerable sense. Reformulated it would mean that murderous ethnic cleansing is the darkest side not of democracy but of nationalism or super sovereignty, the project of deciding with whom a group shares, or does not share, the earth. Its vision is monocratic not democratic – unless, of course, one wishes to define it as such. In any event, we need more clarity than we receive between democracy’s being a *cause* of murderous ethnic cleansing and democracy’s being a strand in the pre-murderous *environment* in which tyrannical cleansing projects unfold. Obviously, the former argument is more disturbing. Yet Mann himself adduces no convincing evidence for it.

Politics and Judgement

Fascists and Dark Side, it will be apparent, are the product of a sophisticated mind, steeped in history and sensitive to paradox. *Incoherent Empire* is a polemic, written

at great speed and motivated by outrage. For all the wrong reasons, it will be widely appreciated.

Mann's point of departure is the ostensible 'grand strategy for a global American Empire, first envisioned as theory, then after 9–11 becoming reality' (Mann 2003: 2). Under both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, he says, US foreign and security policy has witnessed a significant shift in direction. From 1945 until the early 1990s, the United States sought to rule through an 'informal empire' of alliances and proxies. Recently, however, it has acquired territorial ambitions. In embryo, the policy began with Clinton who believed that US power could be an instrument of good. But the new, territorial imperialism required three triggers: George W. Bush's election as president in 2000, 'the staffing of a US administration by neo-conservative Christian chicken-hawks with a mysterious affinity to the Israeli political right' (*ibid.*: 8), and 11 September. Mann does not flinch from associating the mindset of Bush's team with fascists and ethnic cleansers. He adds 'I fear politicians when they come bearing morality!' (*ibid.*).

The expression *Incoherent Empire*, rather like the term 'democracy' in *Dark Side*, is somewhat of a misnomer. For Mann proceeds to say that the 'new imperialism' is 'something much simpler and much nastier'; it is nothing more than 'the new militarism' (*ibid.*: 9). Hegemony has been replaced by power imposed 'at the barrel of a gun' (*ibid.*: 252). Its consequence will be further terrorism and 'blowback' because the territorial ambitions of Bush and colleagues are bound to be frustrated. The dream of subordinating the world to American power, and to occupying lands that threaten it, is incoherent. US resources – military, economic, political, economic, ideological – are hopelessly inadequate for the scale of the neo-conservative enterprise. After recapitulating his four dimensional model of power, Mann examines US policy in relation to Afghanistan, the war against Muslim terrorism, North Korea and Iraq. He argues that the American Empire is 'a military giant, a back-seat economic driver, a political schizophrenic and an ideological phantom. The result is a disturbed, misshapen monster stumbling clumsily across the world' (*ibid.*: 13).

Because I do not accept the premise of this book – that the so called neo-conservatives wish to found a territorial empire – I do not accept much of the argument that follows. But a number of Mann's points hit home. Jettison from *Incoherent Empire* its leaden theoretical edifice, its antipathy to Israel, and its disdain for American culture. Focus instead on the attention he gives to small details, particularly the details of lives torn apart by war: a wedding party bombed to hell, prisoners tortured, people degraded in the name of liberty. By recalling these events, the victims are not forgotten. Palpable in such accounts is a basic decency, the humanity of Mann when confronted with Man's inhumanity.

Mann is right to say that the Bush administration was woefully unprepared for winning the peace in Iraq. He is right to pinpoint many instances of misjudgement and hubris. Few doubt that the unconditional incarceration of captives at Guantánamo Bay is a flagrant violation of the rule of law. But these criticisms are commonplace. In a book of any political seriousness, one expects to see a writer tackle the difficult questions, not answer the easy ones. One expects to see criticism

unfold within an understanding of the dilemmas that Great Powers face in their quest for security, economic stability and political influence. One expects to see recognition of the agonizing choices that politicians of all stripes must make between intervention and abstention in world affairs. Most of all one hopes that a political writer will challenge his or her constituency rather than pander to its prejudices. By all these measures, Mann's book is a failure.

It teems with strange judgements. We are told that 'the US hates Cuba's liking for socialism' (*ibid.*: 194). How does Mann know what Cubans like en masse? They have no institutional channels to express their opinion of socialism. Mann suggests that an option for the United States, instead of killing or capturing bin Laden, might be to mollify him:

Obviously, the US *could* satisfy his grievances. If it did not support Israel, if its troops left the Arabian peninsula, if it made up with Saddam, bin Laden would stop attacking ... Despite the religious rhetoric and the bloody means, bin Laden is a rational man. There is a simple *reason* why he attacked the US: American imperialism. (*ibid.*: 169, emphasis the original)

On Iraq, Mann underplays the extent to which the pre-2003 containment of Iraq was crumbling. Saddam was 'a tinpot Iraqi dictator' (*ibid.*: 83), a facetious description that might surprise Saddam's Shia and Kurd victims. And Mann makes the rather startling claim, for a writer versed in geopolitics, that while Saddam was a threat to his own region, he was no menace to the United States (*ibid.*: 217) – as if US territory is the same as US interests in the flow of Middle East oil, regional security, and balance of power. Mann's stance on Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait is weighted in favor of the aggressor: Saddam was 'misled by a ghastly mistake by the US ambassador into thinking the US would not intervene' (*ibid.*). That miscommunication is well documented. But Mann makes it appear that an act of war – anticipated months in advance – was finally the fault of the US. Everything in this book is; or, at least, everything significant.

The book is also evasive. Consider the chapter Mann devotes to North Korea. The regime of Kim Jong Il is the most brutal in the world. For over five decades, the Kim dynasty has systematically terrorized and immiserated its people. From 1994 to 1998, between 2 and 3 million people died of starvation, prompted by 'natural disasters' but amplified by chaotically ruthless political and economic management. Mass hunger continues. The stream of emaciated refugees that daily try to cross the border into China, and who are then captured and sent back for punishment, is pitiful. North Korea still operates the hereditary rule which condemns three generations of a family to imprisonment for the misconduct of one its members. A BBC documentary verified recently the rumor that the regime is conducting laboratory experiments on political prisoners to test its chemical and biological weapons.

Mann recognizes North Korea's brutality and condemns it. What he fails to acknowledge are the devilish dilemmas that such a state poses for democratic

nations like the United States. If one provides ‘security guarantees’ for North Korea’s existence, as Mann canvasses, one legitimates the slavery of its people. If one does not furnish such guarantees, one is blamed for encouraging North Korea’s nuclear proliferation – as if a regime like Kim’s ever had any plans to divest itself of nuclear capacity. Totalitarian states are inherently paranoid. If one offers the regime concessions, in aid for instance, these are likely to be used to repress more effectively. If one does not offer such concessions, one is party to the material suffering their absence will or may cause North Korean civilians. A host of other dilemmas tax the US’s relation to China. Taiwan, for instance, must not be encouraged to declare *de jure* independence lest that trigger a Chinese invasion of the island. Yet China must also know that the United States cares about what happens to the first Chinese democracy; without US power, Taiwan would long ago have been coercively absorbed into the PRC. This is the real world in which US diplomacy has to operate.

Mann shows no interest in this world. He does not talk about the difficult trade-offs that politicians have to make in promoting security and promoting democracy. Instead he apportions blame to a predictable villain. His solicitude is for people like Kim. The real problem in the Korean peninsula is the inflammatory language of George W. Bush. He has woefully provoked Kim to anger and to feelings of insecurity. Instead, the Bush administration should deal with Kim, bribe him if need be. His regime needs ‘inducements’ to change its behavior rather than threats (*ibid.*: 195). But how does one monitor the success of inducements in a hermetic state? Mann has no answer. He does not even ask the question. He commends as pragmatic the deal struck with Kim in 1994 by the Clinton administration. In exchange for North Korea’s abandoning its nuclear program, the United States agreed to spearhead an arrangement to compensate the regime for its lost energy capacity, notably by providing heavy fuel oil. We now know that North Korea was developing nuclear-weapons technology all the time. In short, it was cheating on its agreement. But rather than draw out the implications of that conclusion – it is hugely difficult to monitor reliably, and impossible to trust, a totalitarian state – Mann taxes the United States for being slow to ‘honor its commitments’ and for being behind schedule in its delivery of light water reactors.

Throughout *Incoherent Empire*, Mann projects himself as a realist. Cultivate a sense of perspective, he says. Calm down. Avoid utopian solutions. Stop moralizing. But when one examines closely his response to international events, one sees a distinctive kind of realism in play: not the classical realism of Hans Morgenthau, or the offensive realism of John Mearsheimer, or even the defensive realism of Kenneth Waltz, but the realist pacifism of the new peace movement. The older peace movement of the 1980s was, above all, hopeful. It thought real change was possible. Its opposition to nuclear weapons entailed risks but ones its activists thought worth taking. If the movement was also often naïve and utopian, it was at least passionate about liberty. The new peace movement, at least in the form advanced by its key intellectuals, is cynical and conservative. Its tell-tale signs are unmistakable: the refusal ever to specify the conditions under which state force

should be used against tyrants; the floatation of pseudo-alternatives (like the ones regarding bin Laden) that never have a chance of being adopted; studied insularity – if terrorists ‘do not attack us’, we should mind our own business (*ibid.*: 177, 189); relentless despair when it comes to Iraq or Afghanistan. Mann concludes his discussion of the latter by saying ‘Al-Qaeda was kicked out of the country, which was the main point. But did Afghanistan benefit? I doubt it’ (*ibid.*: 155). Afghanistan’s fate is still in the balance. Warlordism in the south, a drug economy, and poverty are not quickly erased. The United States and its partners need to do much more to foster state-building there. But many Afghans take a different view from Mann. Since the Taliban’s ousting, 3 million refugees have returned to the country. The October 2004 election witnessed 10.5 million registered voters take part in the country’s newly established democratic process. Reporters who covered the election were struck by the Afghans’ refusal to be intimidated, by their enthusiasm and hope.⁵ ‘Thoughtful wishing’, to use Abraham Lowenthal’s resonant phrase, is itself a condition of forging a better life. And, elsewhere, American power is making a positive difference. Over the last two years Bush initiatives have been integral to democracy promotion in Lebanon, Ukraine, Egypt and Kyrgystan.⁶ If this is interference, the much maligned ‘export of democracy’, I am all for it.

Strangest of all, the discipline’s premier historical sociologist has produced a distinctly unhistorical book. This is not because it deals with current events, but because it fails to see these events in a longer time frame or root them in American national life. Yes, US administrations are addressing new problems, of which the threat of failing states and of WMD in the hands of non-state actors are the most urgent. But much of what Mann perceives as incoherent is part of a durable heritage which continues to survive its ‘contradictions’. American foreign policy is shaped by the political culture of American exceptionalism: the conviction of being a ‘city on the hill’, a beacon of freedom and individualism, a nation in which democratic legitimacy derives from the Constitution not international law, and in which the Declaration of Independence is assumed to possess universal moral standing.⁷ Raymond Aron notes that the ‘duality of expansionism and anti-imperialism, of will to power and moralism, is ... evident in the very beginnings of the republic’.⁸ Coalitions of the willing recall US involvement in the First World War as an ‘associated’ not an ‘allied’ power. Preemption, unilateralism and hegemony were first devised by John Quincy Adams, son of the United States’ second president.⁹ They have been practiced widely since then. The idealist commitment to export democracy and freedom is, in its current manifestation, ‘Wilsonianism with teeth’.¹⁰

Conclusion

In sum, Mann’s recent works are instructive in different ways. *Fascists* and *Dark Side* are major contributions to scholarship, impressive in their breadth, and acute in many of their observations. They will leave a significant legacy. Mann’s reflections on ‘the new militarism’, in contrast, are symptomatic of much that is wrong with the prevailing critique of the United States. All three books reveal an author who is

outstanding in his capacity for synthesis. They also display a common vagueness about key explanatory concepts, and, on occasion, a procrustean attempt to force historical nuance into sociological categories. If in this age of specialization, we need Mann's vision and his passion, we also need something else that will not be found in the books reviewed above: the ability, as Raymond Aron once put it, to know the difference between writing a book and governing a country. But that takes us beyond Michael Mann and brings us face-to-face with an academic *déformation professionnelle* which haunts us all.

Notes

1. That was Hannah Arendt's view. I discuss it at some length in Baehr 2002.
2. This combination accords with minimalist definition of democracy enshrined in such documents as Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Free and fair elections, and the ability of opposition parties to criticize office holders *without fear of physical attack or intimidation*, are conditions that murderous cleansing must destroy.
3. Carothers 2004. He estimates that around 80 nations are presently stuck in this zone, representing versions of 'feckless pluralism' and 'dominant power-politics'. Uzbekistan (which has an official opposition – the Ozod Dehqonlar or Free Peasants party) is an obvious case. I mention it specifically because the massacre in the Uzbek Fergana valley occurred as I was writing this article.
4. For a discussion of these concepts, see the April 2002 issue of the *Journal of Democracy*.
5. 'Democracy's chance in Afghanistan', *Economist*, 9 October 2004, p.11; 'Polls isolate Taliban more than ever', *South China Morning Post*, 11 October 2004, p. A9 (this is a Reuters report).
6. For details, see Kaplan 2005.
7. The relationship between American nationhood and American foreign policy is lucidly discussed in Fukuyama 2004: 104–114.
8. 'The Imperial Republic', in Aron 2002: 245–403, at p. 254. Aron's text is a model of how sociologists might understand the complexities of American foreign policy.
9. See Gaddis 2004.
10. The expression comes from Mearsheimer 2005.

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