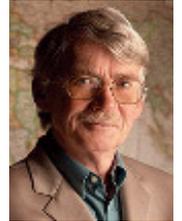


# Five minutes with Michael Mann: “Globalisation has never been a singular process; it’s always been a multiple one”

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2013/04/11/five-minutes-with-michael-mann-globalisation-has-never-been-a-singular-process-its-always-been-a-multiple-one/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2013/04/11/five-minutes-with-michael-mann-globalisation-has-never-been-a-singular-process-its-always-been-a-multiple-one/)

11/04/2013

*How do we conceptualise processes of globalisation, and what impact does European integration have on nation states? As part of our on-going ‘Thinkers on Europe’ series, EUROPP’s editors spoke to Michael Mann about his view of globalisation, the effect of the European Union on European states, and the rise of the far-right in Europe.*



## **You’ve described globalisation as a ‘fractured process’. What do you mean by this?**

The first modern phase of globalisation, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was that of empires. It was multiple, segmented globalisation. There were some 12 different empires – if you include the Japanese and the Americans at the end of the period – so the process of globalisation was not a singular thing, but a plural thing. However, I also believe that the globalisation of economic power relations, political relations, ideological relations, and military relations are all different processes, and they have different logics of development, though they’re all interacting. So globalisation has never been a singular process; it’s always been a multiple one.

The most obvious form of ‘dual globalisation’ today is that on the one hand we’ve got the emergence of a genuinely global capitalism, much of which is transnational. But on the other hand we’ve also had the globalisation of the nation state. Every political entity in the world calls itself a ‘nation state’: some of them don’t have sovereign control over their territory, and the ‘nation’ doesn’t really exist, but it’s the ideal, the singular ideal. And the nation state is not being undermined by globalisation. Although its powers of political economy are slightly restricted, it’s still expanding into other areas: regulation of gender relations and intrusion into what can happen within the family are examples of this. So the nation state is shifting somewhat, but it’s still very important.

Europe is distinctive in this. The European Union is the only organisation of its kind in the world – and it needed Europeans to kill 75 million other Europeans for it to develop. So there are both EU institutions – which are macro/regional and don’t really exist anywhere else – and the nation states. There is a continuing tension between them. The Eurozone crisis, for example, can be attributed to the fact that there isn’t an EU treasury: whereas there is in the United States. And that is a product of the political leaders, when they set up the euro, knowing full well that they would not have the approval of their nations. So they set up a common currency without the necessary political institutions because political institutions are still responsive to national democracies – and in the last set of referendums (on the Constitutional Treaty) the voting went against deepening the Union.

## **Would you consider the European Union to be a new type of empire?**

I don’t consider the European Union to be a new type of empire because I define ‘empires’ as the acquisition, by the centre, of power in the periphery by force. Now it’s true that the European Union is a dominant presence in its region, and as the countries around it want to join – and therefore have to conform to certain requirements – there is a kind of power relationship, but it’s a voluntary one. They want something that the European Union has, and they have to give it something in return: it’s an egalitarian relationship if you like. Well empires are intrinsically not egalitarian.

## **Do you think that European integration has weakened European nation states?**

Obviously in certain respects it’s infringed on the sovereignty of individual states, but again it has been done by consent, or at least the consent of European elites – because the European Union has always been a top-down, intra-elite set of relations. So yes, state sovereignty is curtailed: it’s curtailed judicially, in terms of courts; it’s

curtailed in terms of how much independence of political economy there is in certain respects; it's opened up labour markets, so countries can't keep their labour markets as protected as before; tariffs have gone within the European Union. These are all curtailments, but it's been done through a process of consent between states.

### **Would you say there is a democratic deficit in Europe?**

Yes, there is a democratic deficit, though that's often thought of in terms of a kind of central set of institutions – a bureaucracy, etc. – and I don't think of it that way. I think of it as being a set of geopolitical relations between states, essentially, with the more powerful states having more power. So Germany is the dominant presence, followed by France, Britain, and Italy.

There is a parliament, but if that parliament was strengthened then people in the individual states might also identify that as a democratic deficit, from the perspective that they should be in control of their own institutions. The other thing is that the EU's bureaucracy is not very big – it has very few resources compared to those of the individual nation states – so it's not something I find tremendously worrying. It would be more worrying if there were anti-democratic tendencies within the individual states – and there are in some cases.

### **You've written extensively on Fascism. How do you explain the appeal and rise of far-right parties in Europe, such as the Golden Dawn in Greece?**

Well so far most of the recent far-right movements have not been fascist. They haven't had a developed ideology – a theory of how society ought to be – and they're also very often anti-state, whereas fascism was essentially about having a much stronger state. They also tend to be somewhat single issue movements, mainly focused on immigration. But clearly if political institutions don't appear to be coping well with the problems confronting them, then there's a tendency for new ideologies to emerge – perhaps on the left, perhaps on the right – which claim to have better solutions. That becomes somewhat more popular in the current situation, but none of them have managed to get beyond around 15-20 per cent of the votes yet, so it's impossible to say whether it's going to be a longer lasting phenomenon.

When the Great Depression occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was one thing in common across all major countries, which is that every single government in power at the beginning was kicked out by the end. Now some of those were simply transitions to the opposition parties, such as in Britain and the United States, but others were transitions to far-right or far-left parties, and fascism emerged out of that. The current crisis is not as big as that, but it's had the same consequence of throwing out governments – not uniformly, but for the most part. And if they don't solve the crisis, they might get thrown out again.

However whether this leads to anti-democratic consequences is another question. In the countries at the time of the Great Depression where democracy was firmly institutionalised, you simply had the opposition party taking power. It was in those countries where democracy was either non-existent or fragile that you had far-right movements entering government. So I wouldn't be all that pessimistic, but clearly the interesting thing about the last few years is that centre-right parties are now experiencing problems from their far-right, and that weakens parties like the Republicans in the United States and the Conservative Party in the UK. But I think it's unlikely that there would be an overthrow of democratic institutions unless there's a really major crisis, such as climate change might eventually bring – then anything is possible.

### **Can you envisage a 'single European society'?**

I've always argued that single societies don't actually exist. Even at the height of the nation state we can see that capitalism is always somewhat transnational, ideologies are somewhat transnational, and these things flow across the world regardless of state boundaries. So I don't think that Europe can be seen as a singular society. Obviously the process of integration could go further, but in the foreseeable future I don't see it going as far as to produce centralised political institutions and the end of the nation state.

You can see today that national identities remain strong: most people define themselves by their nationality first, and then by their nationality and Europe. Very few people define themselves as European first, so that's going to continue for a while. But Europe has shared institutions for a very long time – the western Christian tradition, political institutions, warfare propensity – so it's not entirely new that people could think of themselves as both a nationality, and European.

*Please read our comments policy before commenting.*

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

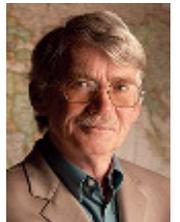
Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/ZFh4P7>

---

## About the author

**Michael Mann** – *University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)*

Michael Mann is Distinguished Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He is the author of [The Sources of Social Power](#) (Cambridge University Press, [Vol I](#), 1986; [Vol II](#), 1993; [Vol III](#), 2012; [Vol IV](#), 2013), [Fascists](#) (Cambridge University Press, 2004), and [The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing](#) (Cambridge University Press, 2005).



-