

BOOK REVIEWS

Title	Author(s)/Editor(s)	Reviewer
<i>Coercion, Capital, and European States</i>	Charles Tilly	Henri J.M. Claessen
<i>Nations and Nationalism since 1780</i>	E.J. Hobsbawm	Brian Jenkins
<i>States and Urban-Based Revolutions</i>	Farideh Farhi	Charles Tilly
<i>Revolutionary Syndicalism</i>	Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe	Erik Olssen
<i>Toward a Social History of the American Civil War</i>	Maris A. Vinovskis	Earl F. Mulderink, III
<i>The Agony of Modernization</i>	Benjamin Martin	Joseph Harrison
<i>St Petersburg between the Revolutions</i>	Robert B. McKean	Reinhart Köbler
<i>Women & Revolution in Yugoslavia</i>	Barbara Jancar-Webster	Mira Bogdanović

TILLY, CHARLES. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990*. [Studies in Social Discontinuity] Basil Blackwell, Cambridge (Mass.) [etc.] 1990. xi, 269 pp. Maps. £ 25.00.

Let me make it immediately clear: this is a good and important book. It is well-written, and it presents the complex history of European state formation over a time span of one thousand years in a most understandable way. With a profound knowledge of history and amazing compository skill Tilly takes his readers by the hand and leads them where he wants them to go: pondering the vicissitudes of Venice, realizing the inevitable harshness of Muscovite rulers, seeing the fortunes of Britain, and admiring the magnitude of France. To make it possible to present such complex developments in so limited a number of pages, Tilly had to leave out many details and restrict himself to those phenomena which – according to his theoretical

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views – played a decisive role. It is here that differences of opinion may arise, for Tilly approaches history from specific theoretical and methodological perspectives – and one may assume that not all scholars will share these views.

Tilly does not make the reviewer's task easy. In his Preface he tells us that there is no need to consider whether he "failed to consider major ideas, missed crucial events, ignored important contradictions, or explained some changes incorrectly" (p. xi). Most probably there will be such errors in the book, and specialists certainly will signal these; I will not attempt to do that. Next, Tilly informs more theoretically minded reviewers how *not* to approach the book: "It would be illegitimate to complain that the argument neglects variables the critic happens to regard as important: physical environment, ideology, military technology, or something else. The missing-variable criticism only becomes legitimate when the critic shows that neglect of the variable causes a false reading of relationships that *do* appear in the argument" (p. 36). As we are told first not to discuss details, and then are warned not to complain about missing variables, there is not much left to discuss. Yet, I understand Tilly's position: nothing is more frustrating than being attacked on issues wholly extraneous to the line of argument.

In spite of these warnings, I will first consider some of his assumptions, and then take a closer look at the models Tilly develops to explain the processes of state formation. Let us start with his definition of states (p. 1). He defines them as "coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories". To say that this is a rather vague formulation would be an understatement. With such criteria it is even difficult to distinguish the state from a chieftdom or a mafia mob.

The definition, moreover, holds as equally well for the early states of the Maya as for the Soviet Union during the Cold War. This broadness may be considered an advantage, but in view of the fact that the book discusses the emergence of the nation state in Europe, a more limiting formulation might have been desirable. Another aspect of the definition also must be signalled: Tilly makes coercion the dominant characteristic of the state – and this leads to a continuous underplaying of the other characteristic of all political organizations – and thus of states, too – namely *legitimacy*. There is no reference to legitimacy even in the index. Yet there is a permanent interaction between (formulated slightly differently) coercion and consensus in state organizations. The one moment coercion is the dominant feature, the other moment consensus. Legitimacy can be defined as the situation in which the rulers as well as the ruled share the conviction that the existing division of power – and as a consequence of this, the rules and regulations issued by the government – is right. Most governments try very hard to make their rule legitimate in the eyes of their subjects, if only because of the fact that people who agree are easier to rule. Coercion is always the most inefficient way to get things done. Legitimacy is a matter of ideology – but nor does the index contain a reference to ideology. It should be noted in passing that a lot of phenomena, usually associated with "coercion", are in fact connected with making citizens obey obvious rules about, say, traffic regulations, robbery, rape, and so on. Maurice Godelier once pointed out that in the relation between dominant and dominated two elements are found, violence and consent, and that "of these two components of power the stranger is not the violence

of the dominant, but the consent of the dominated to their domination".¹ Where this is found the dominated share – whether or not with deep conviction – the ideology of the dominators. One might think that these considerations do not really concern Tilly's line of approach. But since he makes coercion the dominant characteristic of the state, I think it is important to point out his neglect of the other. A final comment on his concept of "state" must be that it is not the state that does or does not do this or that; it is the *people*, those who manage polities and those who manage those who manage. We should not, as Radcliffe-Brown warned in 1940, try to reificate the "state".²

There is another aspect of Tilly's approach that needs to be put in perspective: his view that war was a major factor in the emergence of the nation state in Europe. In general I do not disagree with his analysis of the role of war. The problem is, however, that war is not an independent variable. War is the derivative of underlying causes: demographic, economic, or ideological (and every possible combination of the three). Wars are fought because of population pressure, to protect economic interests, to dominate strategic routes, to take control of resources, and so on. Wars are also fought for ideological reasons: to propagate religion, or to prevent the spread of another one; to avenge abuse or insult. And, since Tilly has omitted ideology (and legitimation) from his analysis, his picture of war and coalitions is inevitably slightly distorted.

Interestingly, in several places Tilly refers implicitly or explicitly to aspects of ideology and legitimation, for example where he mentions the main tasks of the state (pp. 96ff.), and the obligations of the state (that is the rulers) among which adjudication plays a central role. The same holds for the efforts to homogenize populations – efforts clearly connected with a struggle for legitimation. The Napoleonic wars (pp. 109–111) cannot be explained without reference to ideological components (*Allons, enfants de la Patrie*), and the same holds for the emergence of nationalism (pp. 116ff.). And is it possible to leave out Hitler's campaign to make the Germans choose canons above butter from an explanation of the Second World War?

Similar reflections can be made with regard to the way in which the economic factor is presented – and neglected. In many places (e.g., pp. 112, 119 and 129) the dominant role of economy (the struggle for resources) is mentioned. Tilly leaves us in no doubt that the economic factor is important: "We discover again the great importance of control over food as an administrative challenge, as a point of political contention, and as an incentive to popular action" (p. 112). Yet we do not find economy as a separate factor in the models or the figures. Everything is subsumed within just two concepts: "coercion" and "capital". This may be helpful when it comes to presenting clear and simple diagrams, but it leaves us with a rather simplified explanatory model. To remedy this, additional diagrams can be conceived. For example, one in which the degree of legitimacy versus the degree of coercion is presented. Such a diagram will make it possible to make finer distinctions

¹ Maurice Godelier, "Infrastructures, Societies, and History", *Current Anthropology*, 19 (1978), p. 767.

² Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Preface", in: E. E. Evans-Pritchard and M. Fortes (eds), *African Political Systems* (Oxford, 1940).

between say Russia, Brandenburg, and Sweden – but also between the Dutch Republic, Venice, and Switzerland. Another diagram can be drawn in which the underlying factors behind war (economic, demographic, ideological) are presented in relation to the frequency or intensity of wars. Such a diagram might show a shift in the relative influence of the factors suggested. I do not think that such additions will change Tilly's overall picture of state development in Europe fundamentally, for he has presented the phenomenon in a most remarkable way. But even when one admires greatly the effort to analyse complex historical developments using the sort of models Tilly does, one must be aware of the pitfalls associated with this approach.

Henri J.M. Claessen

HOBBSAWM E.J. Nations and nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 1990. viii, 191 pp. £ 14.95.

The rise of nations and nationalisms is a relentless characteristic of global political development over the last two hundred years, and Marxists have always found the phenomenon particularly problematic. Indeed, according to Tom Nairn, the theory of nationalism is Marxism's "great historical failure".¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that Professor Hobsbawm has finally been led to address the subject in detail. The "national question" has doggedly pursued him through his work both as a historian of capitalism and the labour movement,² and as a politically committed Marxist responding to contemporary issues.³ Until now, however, his writings on the topic have been dispersed within historical works of wider compass, or in occasional essays spread over a period of some twenty years. This book, based on a series of lectures delivered at The Queen's University, Belfast in 1985, is his first attempt to confront the specific issue of nationalism in systematic and comprehensive fashion.

In terms of its erudition, its geographical and historical scope, the energy and lucidity of its argument, *Nation and Nationalism since 1780* is undoubtedly a *tour de force*. This is a relatively short book on a very large topic, strongly interpretative and thus provocative. The essence of Professor Hobsbawm's position is that nations are largely constructed from above, political artefacts based on the principle of the modern territorial state. "Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round" (p. 10) and thus nations are engineered or even invented. He recognises, of course, that the promotion of national consciousness requires a degree of popular receptivity, and typically this depends on a certain level of economic and technological development, which breaks down social and regional particularisms and draws the popular masses into the process. But, as he insists yet again later in the

¹ Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus", *New Left Review*, 94 (1975).

² See, for example, chapters on the issue in his *The Age of Revolution 1789–1848* (1962), *The Age of Capital 1848–1875* (1975), *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (1987) and *Worlds of Labour* (1984).

³ Notably his reply to Tom Nairn in *New Left Review*, 105 (1977).