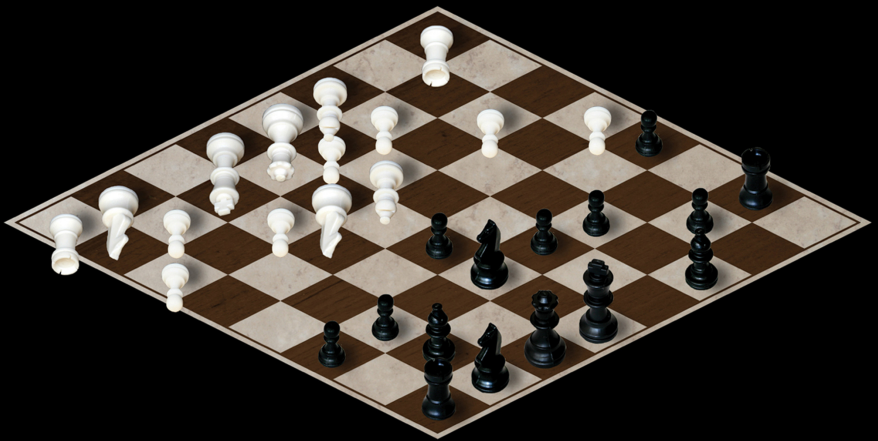


# NATIONS, STATES AND EMPIRES



JOHN A. HALL

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polity

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First published in 2024 by Polity Press

Polity Press  
65 Bridge Street  
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press  
111 River Street  
Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

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ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-6324-1 (hardback)  
ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-6325-8 (paperback)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023949988

Typeset in 11 on 14pt Warnock Pro  
by Fakenham Prepress Solutions, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 8NL  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ Books Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

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# Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for support provided by Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council, the Universities of McGill, Princeton and Edinburgh, and the Danish National Bank for providing housing that allowed for a long stay in Copenhagen. Very helpful advice and criticism came from Frank Trentmann, Francesco Duina, Michael Mann, Siniša Malešević, Ralph Schroeder, Krzysztof Pelc, Lilli Riga, Matthew Lange, David McCrone, and from the readers who advised *Polity*. In addition, I thank Emre Amasyali and John Campbell, with whom I have worked respectively on the nineteenth-century land empires and on postwar capitalist political economy. The incisive editorial skill of John Thompson was vital, with the team at *Polity* a model of courtesy and efficiency. The copy-editing provided by Susan Beer was superb. The canvas covered by the book is huge, and mistakes inevitable; I am responsible for all of them.

# Introduction

The war in Ukraine surprised and then convulsed the world polity. How should it be characterized? From one angle, the Russian invasion is pure imperialism, as such facing powerful nationalist resistance. This is to say that Russia has not been able to secure a stable identity after the end of the Cold War as a nation state. This is not how Vladimir Putin sees matters (Putin 2021). It may be that geopolitical insecurity is the key driving force in the decision to invade, with this being directed against the imperial pretensions of the United States. But Putin stresses something more, namely that Ukraine is and always has been a part of Russia – an old trope, as members of the elite in late Tsarist Russia made the same point, well aware that Ukraine had to accept itself as ‘little Russia’ if Russian ethnics were to comprise more than half of the population of the empire. There is something more: when early attempts by defeated great powers to join the West are rebuffed, there is a tendency for feelings of humiliation to lead to embracing an alternative extreme (Zarakol 2010). This has been true in the past in Russia, and it seems characteristic of Putin’s behaviour: longing to ‘get in’ has been replaced by a strange theory of ‘super ethnicity’ envisioning an entirely new civilizational order (Clover 2016).



This is but one example of the fact that interactions between nations, states and empires have created and continue to dominate world affairs. These interactions cause variability in the very meaning of these terms: differing conditions of existence are involved rather than permanent essences of any sort. Empires changed character when facing the nationalist principle within the competitive state system, for instance, while nations can destroy empires or provide the cement that makes nation states viable – with these different routes characteristically resulting from the way in which nations are treated by the states with which they interact. This book traces these patterns in the historical record. The central claim is that the popular idea of nation states succeeding empires in certain historical progression is far from the mark (Wimmer 2013: 2). Empires have continued alongside nation states, indeed overseeing them in the industrial era. The two world wars were imperial wars, rather than wars between nation states. Even after rapid decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s, empires persisted in the USA and the USSR, though both denied that they had that status. Furthermore, empires are not finished: Russia and China have joined the USA in showing imperial dispositions, and even the European Union thinks of itself occasionally in these terms – while both India and Turkey now exhibit imperial features, both internally and externally. The huge division between advanced nation-state construction in the North and its earlier stage in much of the South equally cannot be understood without reference to imperial history. All of this can be highlighted by saying that nation states and empires do not exist in separate compartments. Rather, they often overlap: there can be imperial nationalism and nationalist empires, that is, empires as nations and nations as empires. Consider the USA – at once highly nationalist and the greatest empire in the history of the world (Lieven 2004; Hopkins 2018). The relations between imperialism

and nationalism are complex, with empires often colluding with nationalism, at times inventing or encouraging it for their own purposes. The nation state may have become the normative ideal of the contemporary world but ambivalences and ambiguities remain.

This introduction provides definitions allowing the argument to get under way. There are two approaches to conceptual clarification, one tight offering to guide research, the other following research, prone to be somewhat looser in light of variability within the historical record. This book insists on the latter approach because reality is messy. A loose definition of empire incorporates the way in which the United States structures the rules of the world's political economy, though this is not to deny the fact that no empire in recent times has been equivalent – not so total, ambitious or murderous – to that of Nazi Germany, merely to see it as a particular form within a broader category. There is further ambivalence at this point: Hitler was certainly expansionist, but his aim was less that of ruling over other peoples than of cleansing or killing them so that he could have a larger nation state, home to a single ethnicity (Mazower 2008). Equally, Napoleon was at one and the same time the ruler of France and the would-be emperor of something much larger. The same consideration applies to the important work of the sociologist Andreas Wimmer (Wimmer 2013). His concentration on nation-state formation privileges nationalism as a force for secession (Hiers and Wimmer 2013). This misleads by ignoring the behaviour of established states, capable of being imperialist and nationalist (Overy 2021) – something ruled out by his austere, cartesian, either/or classification system which sees Japan, Germany and Russia as nation states from 1868, 1871 and 1905 respectively (Hooks 2015). What will later be termed here the marriage of nationalism and imperialism suggests a different causal account of the catastrophic era of the world wars.

## Empires

Most human beings have lived in empires throughout recorded history. That fact makes it easy to dispel a myth about empires immediately, namely that they are caused by capitalism. This cannot be true. Empires were in existence for centuries before capitalism by any standard had become something like a general mode of production. Empires have usually been headed by a single figure, though there are exceptions both in the past and present. A definition will take us further. Empires are usefully conceptualized in terms of a rimless bicycle wheel: a single centre blessed with a high culture radiates out to separate territories habitually different linguistically and culturally, capable of managing most of what we take to be governmental functions by themselves. Links between the territories are almost wholly absent, with ruling elites being much like icing on a cake; a military, political and ideological elite stretched over large spaces beneath which lay all sorts of communities with which it either could not or did not want to interfere (Gellner 1983: 8–18). This is capstone government. Examples abound: Confucianism was an elite ideology, with that elite caring little what magical nonsense was believed by the masses, while only the architectural styles of the Roman elite were present in the empire as a whole. A related point can be made about the powers of imperial entities. Anyone visiting Delhi, Rome or the Forbidden City is sure to come away with a sense of immense power. There is truth here as these are conquest regimes, greedy for land and people. Imperial might could be mobilized to crush a rebellion mercilessly. But it took time to assemble troops and still more for them to travel; the brutal viciousness of the repression that followed was designed to create absolute fear, a demonstration of power made in the hope that it would not have to be repeated. Tacitus's account of Agricola's conquest of Britain accordingly records

the view of empire of Calgacus, the leader of the Caledonians, expressed in 85 CE: 'To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they create a wilderness and call it peace.' Brutality was equally true of British behaviour in India after the 'mutiny' of 1857 – or, better put, in the first Indian attempt at independence. This is again to say that daily central governmental control was superficial or wholly lacking. This is scarcely surprising. Empires characteristically rule through local elites, as they lack the manpower for direct control. This remained true of Imperial Russia until nearly the end of the nineteenth century: the distinct legal norms of different peoples controlled most of daily life, with the imperial centre placing an imprimatur on this situation because it was far too weak to make its own laws run throughout its whole territory (Burbank 2006). Overseas empires were no different: less than 2,000 British agents in the Indian Civil Service administered India until late in the nineteenth century, although they were backed by a larger officer corps commanding native troops, with Britain anyway benefiting economically in Latin America from gunboat diplomacy rather than direct territorial control. Peace mattered more than social mobilization with rule habitually remaining indirect. Huge territories were held cheaply. The corollary of that situation is simple: when large numbers of metropolitan actors become essential to the running of an empire, it definitively ceases to pay.

Premodern empires were successful worlds unto themselves, founts of stability. They are best defined as imperial worlds, in the case of the most famous among them – Rome/Byzantium and China – possessed of long lives protecting genuine civilizations. However, when the world literally filled up in territorial terms from the eighteenth century on, imperial worlds lost their sense of splendid isolation, forced instead to compete with rivals. The multipolar system of Northwest Europe had created states whose powers had increased exponentially – as is evident in the increase in rates of fiscal and manpower

extraction caused by high levels of conflict (Mann 2023: 25–6, 180–224). These power containers did not immediately have their own way: the Portuguese could not disrupt Arab trading systems in the Gulf, whereas the Dutch had sufficient firepower to be able to do so. Traditional empires were then drawn into the logic of the state system, although the need to change was felt at different moments by different empires – early in the Russian case, later in the Ottoman empire, and latest of all in China, where the mission of George Macartney could still be sent away in 1793, treated as a mere irrelevance. Attempts at self-strengthening were complex and difficult – by no means completely unsuccessful and always essential if what were now imperial states were to survive.

Of course, this is not all that needs to be said about empires. Imperial worlds had been created by conquest, so it was scarcely surprising that the states of Northwest Europe, and eventually Japan, used their increasing powers to conquer in their turn. But these new empires were never worlds unto themselves, merely imperial states, increasingly prone to compete with each other. There were not many such states, and an equally good term to characterize both new and historic empires is ‘world states’ (Darwin 2007: 318). A traditional benefit of size was that of geopolitical security, especially for the Tsarist empire, still reeling from Napoleon’s invasion. Size could also bring profits, as it did in the first British empire and with Russia benefiting from exploiting the agricultural plenty of Ukraine. Population mattered for Britain, first as a new world to which excess people could move, later as a source of troops supporting the metropole in the world wars. We will see later that the new empires faced the need to rationalize as did the older empires entering into a new world. Nonetheless, an oddity attached to these newer, overseas empires. It concerns the vexed question as to whether they were driven by and necessary for the health of the capitalists of the metropolises.

We can start to deepen our understanding here by noting what Adam Smith had to say about one of them in 1776 in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*:

The rulers of Great Britain have, for more than a century past, amused the people with the imagination that they possessed a great empire on the west side of the Atlantic. This empire, however, has hitherto existed in imagination only. It has hitherto been, not an empire, but the project of an empire; not a gold mine, but the project of a gold mine; a project which has cost, which continues to cost, and which, if pursued in the same way as it has been hitherto, is likely to cost immense expence, without being likely to bring any profit; for the effects of the monopoly of the colony trade, it has been shewn, are, to the great body of the people, mere loss instead of profit ... If the project cannot be completed, it ought to be given up. If any of the provinces of the British empire cannot be made to contribute towards the support of the whole empire, it is surely time that Great Britain should free herself from the expence of defending these provinces in time of war, and of supporting any part of their civil or military establishments in time of peace, and endeavour to accommodate her future views and designs to the real mediocrity of her circumstances. (Smith 1975: 946–7)

Smith noted that free trade in the Americas, especially between the West Indies and the Thirteen Colonies was a great success. But the trade with the metropole was very different. “The industry of Great Britain, instead of being accommodated to a great number of small markets, has been principally suited to one great market ... But the whole system of her industry and commerce has thereby been rendered less secure ... Great Britain resembles one of those unwholesome bodies in which some of the vital organs are overgrown ... The expectation

of a rupture with the colonies, accordingly, has struck the people of Great Britain with more terror than they ever felt for a Spanish armada, or a French invasion' (Smith 1975: 604). Smith countered this by insisting on the importance of 'The inland or home trade, the most important of all, the trade in which an equal capital affords the greatest revenue, and creates the greatest employment to the people of the country' (Smith 1975: 435). His argument as a whole is based on a counterfactual: if the market were to be left to itself greater profits might easily be available at home and in Europe. Behind this lies something else: Smith disliked mercantilist policies, as the favours given to particular merchants had the capacity to distort the market, to raise the profits of the few against the well-being of the many (Boucoyannis 2013; Hall 2023). The extent to which Smith's analysis captured the first British empire will be addressed at the end of the next chapter. But highlighting key variables at work in his analysis can help guide us throughout.

Empires are indeed projects – but projects of different and at times opposed groups, the central consideration that explains why empires are messy and diverse affairs (Darwin 2009). Missionaries mattered by the end of the nineteenth century, although their activities had been resisted by their metropolises earlier. Colonizers mattered still more, especially in the Russian case – where their activities in the eighteenth century led to a vast increase in the empire's size (Etkind 2011). It is worth insisting here on a difference, best described as that between settler colonies and colonies of occupation and exploitation; the former involved people moving from the metropole, the latter control through local elites – the difference, to take a single example, between the British empire in East as compared to West Africa. As settler colonies are often admired because they became liberal democracies, it is important to remember that the greed for land of Anglo-Saxon settlers led to the earliest, most brutal and savage

genocides (Mann 2005: 70–110). Then imperial outreach can be started by adventurers, whose actions draw in their states. The height of adventurism was that of the East India Company, whose conquests in Bengal led to the state support that eventually created the ‘Jewel in the Crown.’ Capitalists did not always support imperial ventures, especially as the greatest rates of return made overseas in the British case did not come from the colonies of occupation and exploitation controlled directly by the empire (Davis and Huttenback 1988). But several words of warning are in order here. Smith is right to be sceptical of the claim that a piece of territory cannot be lost because of its vital importance for the economy. Capitalism is not static; indeed, a central feature of capitalist behaviour is the ability to adapt, as did Central Europe as soon as the Cold War ended. Smith is equally correct to say that home markets are often crucial, a reminder that trade is often a smaller proportion of national economies than is often realized – and that territorial possessions can easily become a burden rather than a blessing. Smith is really suggesting that the world has changed: conquest is no longer necessary, as market exchange can rule out the need for territorial possession. In general, capitalists are interested in making money, something that very often limits their interest in geopolitics – they can be as much a disappointment to marxist expectations as workers. In the postwar period capitalists in the United States, to take one important example, were reluctant to follow the external ambitions of their state.

This last consideration brings something else to mind. State elites can want empires more than capitalists. One reason for this is hard to explain in our world, which tends to seek for material explanations for every human activity. But power can be a source of pleasure in and of itself, glory and prestige desirable for the psychic benefits they bring. A second reason is equally not materialist: security matters for states. This can mean having defensible borders, more particularly creating a



*cordon sanitaire* that allows warning of invasion. Still more important is the desire to hold on to or to acquire territory so that a rival does not have it, and this even when no clear idea is available as to the benefits it might bring. But elites can choose expansion for a further related reason, considering it necessary to help their economies; that is, they can act in a geoeconomic manner, by seeking their own sources of supply and access to reliable markets. This is not necessarily senseless, but it must be set against Smith's insistence that territorial control can be costly, especially in comparison to the benefits that can come from trade. American independence resulted from the metropole wanting to impose taxes to offset the costs of the support it was giving to the colonists; equally London was suspicious of attempts to expand the empire on the grounds that it was too expensive. It is worth remembering that Smith loathed the restrictive and mercantilist Navigation Acts, preferring instead some looser federal scheme for the empire, one that might even allow the monarchy to move to North America.

This in turn brings to mind levels of rule. The establishment of trading rules can advantage the greatest power, while the sending of gunboats to enforce contracts costs little, as does indirect rule through client rulers; in contrast, if an empire is forced into direct and formal rule in the face of resistance, the game is soon up – for costs quickly outweigh benefits. But calculating costs is hard: these were not always known at the time, with the costs to the state having anyway to be set against the profits of traders. Further, nation-state figures can mislead. The American colonists certainly survived and prospered when independent, having wiped out most of the indigenous population, but they became thereafter, as Smith suggested, part of a single, huge trading bloc – one in which labour migration was easy and important. There is also the unique fact that a peaceful power transition took place between Great Britain and the United States, though the extent to which this

was really due to shared values rather than it being a power grab by the rising power is open to question (Zeren and Hall 2016). And there is one final point that can usefully be added here, one which Smith could scarcely see. Distinct periods of imperialism can be distinguished. In the British case, the early empire in North America – supposedly Protestant, maritime, commercial and free – was followed by expansion in South Asia that created a very different sort of empire, at once exploitative and racist, though in the end this formed part of a free trade regime largely open to all (Marshall 2005). But the heights of imperialism came in the 1890s and still more so in the first half of the last century, with the form itself far from moribund today.

The overseas empires of the European states were given up in the postwar period without causing economic collapse. The linking of nationalism and imperialism had in largest part been based on illusion. It was possible not just for the states in question to live without their empires, but to prosper as a result. If one element involved was the increasing cost of maintaining imperial rule, another was the discovery that the advanced edge of economic life depended far more on brains than brawn. Differently put, the core power of Northern states lay at home, and in interactions with their fellows, rather than resting on the maintenance of imperial possessions. Insofar as the new political economy depended on trade between very specialized national economies, it nonetheless rested upon the presence of an open trading system. That did not come out of the blue. Rather, this was the world constructed by the United States in the final years of the Second World War. Behind the diminished states of the North, bereft of their empires, stood the United States, the greatest empire in the history of the world. One of the questions of the age is that of the maintenance of the American world order, above all because the great hegemon now threatens to kill its own creation.

## States

A state system increases rates of fiscal extraction, enhancing the power of states that survive this struggle of the fittest. The logic of the system of states is best approached by means of the academic approach known as realism, one of the greatest of all intellectual tools for understanding the way the world works. The central insight is simple: states exist in a world without a sovereign, and so characteristically survive only by balancing power in one way or another. There is a revealing measure of ambiguity here: is realism describing the way that states behave or is it proposing that they should behave in this way? There is everything to be said for the latter view, not least as sustained thought is most likely to lead to restraint given the unpredictable nature of war. Clausewitz, for instance, came to realize this, moving from an early definition of war as total struggle to a final one stressing political control, essentially because one's rivals are likely to seek revenge if they have been badly treated (Clausewitz 1976; cf. Aron 1976). Raymond Aron, the French polymath and follower of Clausewitz, underlined the true logic of realism by prefacing his *Peace and War* with a quote from Montesquieu: 'International law is based by nature upon this principle: that the various nations ought to do, in peace, the most good to each other, and, in war, the least harm possible, without detriment to their genuine interests' (Aron 1966). In contrast, there is less to be said for the former position. Calculation is complex at the best of times: the system is open, so that one must calculate the moves of an opponent who is calculating your own, making it very likely that mistakes will be made. Still, one would expect errors to be corrected quickly, wars to be limited and controlled. That is not how things have always played out (Hall 1996). There have been periods of intense escalation demonstrating that realism does not always work according to its abstract logic.

The proper functioning of realism – that is, in terms of its abstract logic – depends on two sociological presuppositions (Hall 1996). The first is that the state system is a society, even if an asocial one. This is not the case at moments of ideological division, between religions, revolutions and secular ideologies (Walt 1966). In such circumstances, states have difficulty in understanding each other. This can easily increase the level of conflict. The second presupposition is that of the ability of a state to calculate. An important philosophical point needs to be made here. A temptation arises when remembering the disasters caused by escalations, namely that of calling the actors involved irrational. We can say from the outside, sometimes at the time and certainly later, that calculations were poor, with means unlikely to reach desired ends. But it will not do, in any way and at any time, to call the actors involved irrational. Perhaps the key finding of all social science is that human beings try to make sense of their lives; what looks crazy from the outside has meaning for the actors involved. This applies everywhere, from fervent Nazi loyalists to those who bombed the Twin Towers in New York City, that is, the best and brightest of their respective societies. The task of sociology is that of reconstructing the rationality of actors. Two points can be made about the state actors involved in escalation. First, calculation may be poor because it is variously bounded: information may be lacking due to defective state structures, with thought being further constrained by the tunnel vision created by strong in-group cohesion. Second, calculation requires understanding difference: ‘national interest’ can vary, with the desire for glory or prestige sometimes being as real, as noted, as more immediate material concerns. A great exemplar of this point came from Aron himself at the time of the Vietnam war. Despite being strongly pro-American and indeed anti-communist, he criticized American strategic thought on the grounds that it had failed to understand the stakes at issue, so much greater for its adversary than for itself (Aron 1969).

Two final points about state conflict must be made here. First, one must step beyond realism. States have done so at times. The frequent failure of balancing to bring peace has led to attempts – by concerts of great powers and through international institutions – to create wholly different ordering principles for the world polity (Ghervas 2021; Trentmann 2007a). Then liberalism has often been seen as an alternative to realism, one likely to bring peace. Sadly, liberal states can be and have been very aggressive, even among themselves. Foreign policymaking by elites within democracies has often been dreadful, and it could be argued that elites still control foreign policy in such states. One liberal response is to increase popular control in the belief that those set to die in war will oppose it. Sadly, there is no evidence that the people are always pacific, although popular opposition in liberal societies can bring unsuccessful wars to an end. But institutions that check and balance can contribute to – rather than, as is often claimed, harm – processes of rational calculation of the national interest: this element of liberalism is wholly meritorious. Second, war can change society in dramatic ways. The experience of conflict can create and then exacerbate nationalist sentiments. Still more importantly, the result of war can cause total societal transformation. East Germany diverged completely from its Western counterpart as the result of Soviet occupation.

States gain much of their character as the result of their interactions with the external world, something in turn that gives them a measure of autonomy over their domestic societies – something not fully captured in most definitions of the state. Still, the most helpful general definition of the state remains that of Max Weber – as a form that monopolizes violence within a particular territory. This is helpful but it enlightens equally by sheer contrast. For there have been many states – such as those of medieval England – that were not able to control violence; the problem of the ‘overmighty

subject' was present as late as the sixteenth century. During the French Wars of Religion, the ardently Catholic family of the Duc de Guise was both prepared and able to call on Spain to intervene in France when disapproving of the religious policies of their own king. State formation is at times mere ambition. States have to be built. In Europe a series of stages can be observed: from the consolidation of state power to the creation of 'national states', and from the creation of national sentiment in war to its consolidation as the result of welfare in a nation state designed as a home for the people – with these stages being traceable through fiscal sociology, with the latter stage seeing (for the first time in the late nineteenth century) states starting to spend more on civil than military affairs.<sup>1</sup> The large definition of the nation state would stress the presence of democracy, a lesser one insisting on the presence of stable and effective nation and state construction in countries that lack it. A fully maximalist definition of the nation state is rarely justified – for the simplest of reasons: foreign policymaking still rests in the hands of elites in democracies, as noted, not least in the United States – which is not to diminish, as noted, the benefits of democratic pressures in bringing rash and ill-considered moves to a speedy conclusion.

At all times state power rests on some sense of legitimacy rather than simply on coercion. Rule in pre-industrial

1 'National state' is an awkward term – as indeed are national interest, international relations and United Nations – because they conflate state and nation. But the term is necessary. It refers to a period between initial state formation and the consolidation of a nation state seen in egalitarian terms as the home of the whole people – a long and fuzzy period, with different sequencing in different countries. It refers to administrative and legal integration within a particular territory, leading aristocracies to become fluent in the language of the state and to develop emotional ties to it – not surprisingly as the nation in question is hierarchical, the home of nobilities. A further element is the replacement of dynasts believing they owned society by rulers feeling that they needed to represent it.

circumstances can depend upon balancing between different factions, often dividing so as to better rule. It is worth emphasizing that elite behaviour – not just skill in balancing but unity between different factions of the elite as well – can determine outcomes. This remains true in modern circumstances that see the entry of the people into politics, though that development does make rule more difficult. Hence one can note a contrast between inclusion and exclusion. The idea of the former is simple and it is best expressed in the brilliant paradox discovered by Albert Hirschman (1978). If you let people ‘in’ they will be less radical because giving them voice may create some sense of loyalty. In contrast, the coercive strategy is likely to encourage politicization, including the possibility of exit, whether internal or external. There can be movement between these positions, a dialectical dance that changes the level of political intensity over time.

These different routes are highly pre-determined. Allowing entry often comes from elites that feel secure, relaxed in the knowledge that they can retain influence if this change is allowed. The British upper classes in the nineteenth century illustrate the point: fear was relatively minimal, allowing the franchise to be extended piece by piece, thereby turning the working class into an estate of the realm (Geary 1981; Ziblatt 2017). In contrast immediate and total participation can scare elites viscerally, thereby encouraging them to seek harsher means – at times repressive, on other occasions pitting some groups against others. As such actions can lead to disaster, it again becomes necessary to reconstruct the rationality of the actors involved rather than condemning them as irrational.

The general point is that social movements habitually gain their character from the nature of the states with which they interact. This clearly applies to working class movements in the years before 1914 (Mann 1993: 510–45, 597–691). In

the United States white males gained the vote in the 1830s, and thereafter saw the state as their own. Of course, workers fought for higher wages and better conditions, suffering many deaths at the hands of Pinkertons in the process, but their struggle took place at the industrial level. Differently put, there was no long-lasting popular socialist party. The short experience of legal discrimination against unions led to something a little stronger in Great Britain, namely a Labour Party – but one that lacked political consciousness, with workers becoming instead an estate within the polity (McKibbin 1984). In contrast to these cases stand those at the other end of the political scale suggested here. In authoritarian Imperial Germany anti-socialist laws between 1878 and 1890 most certainly created political consciousness. Workers had an industrial wing and a political wing, one that read the socialist theorist Karl Kautsky and that established associations of its own that stood outside mainstream society. Bluntly, these workers had to take on the state – that is, they became politically conscious – because the severe restrictions on their ability to organize industrially turned the regime into their target. In autocratic Tsarist Russia matters went one stage further, producing a working class that at times had genuine revolutionary potential (McDaniel 1988). The state often made it absolutely impossible to organize, being prepared to kill those who tried to do so. Total opposition created revolutionary consciousness with the high point that resulted being nothing less than the seizing of power in 1917, so wonderfully described by Trotsky in his history of the revolution. In contrast, moments of political opening sent the Russian working class down a reformist route, with action taking place at the industrial rather than the political level. This variation is a classic demonstration of the differing impacts of exclusion in contrast to inclusion, the former politicizing and radicalizing, the latter at the least stifling discontent and at most creating a measure of loyalty.



## Nations

The sociological principle just invoked applies equally to the other form in which the people enter on to the political stage, that is, as nations, especially given that imperial states at the end of the nineteenth century felt it necessary to nationalize as well as to industrialize. The character of nationalism results from the way in which nations are treated by the states within which they reside, with exclusion and repression always likely to politicize. All of this is to say that neither class nor nation is a thing; rather their salience results from their relationship to power, to the way in which they are treated by states. In both cases interaction effects can be seen: classes and nations become radicalized by exclusion, relatively passive when allowed entry. And there is a further consideration of great importance: class conflict by itself did not and does not provide much social dynamite, principally as hopes of social mobility tend to undermine militancy, even if such hopes are in fact illusory. In contrast, when class inequality is joined by ethnic exclusion, powerful social dynamite is created, as the hope of social mobility is denied (Gellner 1983: 96).

A great deal more needs to be said about nationalism, given the ambiguities surrounding the very idea of nationalism. Crucially, the concept is at once descriptive and prescriptive, an analytic term of social science and one of political practice – that is, in this case of nationalizers wanting to create national solidarity (Brubaker 2004). Closely related to this is the contrast between the nation believed to be a fact, born of blood and/or language, and the nation as an expression of will and choice – though love for a particular piece of territory can be equally important. This division is often seen in terms of a distinction between ethnic and civic conceptions of the nation. The point in question was made with especial force by Ernest Renan in 1882: most Alsatians might speak German