

The Global Political Economy of Israel

Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler

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According to the Realist theory of International Relations, there is a hierarchy of issues that are ranked in order of their importance. Situated at the top of the pyramid are always issues of military security (that is, high vs. low politics). While the real world may not function in this manner, scholarship and academia would appear to. This may account for the complete lack of books about Israel's political economy, since military issues and state survival have continued to take precedence in any examination of Israel's role in the world. In one sense, that is what makes *The Global Political Economy of Israel* so refreshing and so new.

However, in another sense, this book is not really about Israel's political economy at all. Of course, it is full of rich details and thick narrative describing the Israeli political, economic, and social elite (though the lines between each are certainly blurred). Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler dedicate many pages to providing a genealogy of the "who's who" of Israeli movers and shakers and the relationships that exist, especially between the politicians and the capitalists and their backroom dealings.

Yet, in the end, this book is primarily an exploration and examination of the ongoing process of globalization and, as an adjunct, Israel's growing integration and transnationalization as a part of that process. In a normative sense, it is also clear that the authors are not well inclined towards either this process or Israel's inclusion. As a critique, the focus is not solely on globalization and the globalizing process and its detrimental impact as it relates to "a massive increase in income inequality" (350), but more specifically targets the liberal and neoliberal theorists and economists who claim that globalization is a natural, inevitable, and benign process that randomly selects its winners and losers without regard to wealth, status or, most importantly, power.

According to Nitzan and Bichler, there is nothing natural or benign about globalization or neutral about the power structures and processes the various actors are compelled to work within. In fact, in defining globalization they specifically state that "globalization is the spatial spread of *accumulation as power*, whose main vehicle is *the movement of capital*." (60, emphasis in original) Consequently, while power permeates, constructs, and controls the processes and institutions and, hence, the relationships that develop within these structures, Nitzan and Bichler are by no means "Realists." Under particular attack are the Realist notions of the "National Interest" as represented by a theoretically rational and unitary actor. As they inquire, who determines this supposed "National Interest" (225)?

It is clear that Nitzan and Bichler are examining globalization and Israel's role in this process from a critical perspective, one, though never claimed, that seems to fall neatly within the Marxist/neoMarxist camp. In this sense, throughout their analysis, economics is king and making money the only role of a state whose sole function is to further the interests of capital. Of course, such an analysis seems particularly strange in a country where war, conflict, and the "security dilemma" all appear to be essentially non-economic or non-material matters. Yet, according to Nitzan and Bichler, through what they term the "Weapondollar-Petrodollar Coalition" (201), even oil crises and regional instability, and the arms industry that they spawned, were manipulated for a higher purpose—the almighty buck. This is what Nitzan and Bichler refer to as "accumulation through crisis" (19).

Yet, if one just examines their views and perspectives on globalization, they are really not all that radical or all that new. The idea that globalization is primarily a political process of material (and power) accumulation constructed by a transnational capitalist class, comprised especially of dominant finance groups, to further their own profits by expanding overseas and discovering new and untapped markets is

not all that novel. When you include their focus on the ideas behind globalization, the role neoliberal economists perform in the construction of this dominant or hegemonic ideology, and how this transnationalist class utilizes ideology to legitimize this supposedly benign process, mostly by duping or “confusing” the unsuspecting masses (296, 327), Nitzan and Bichler are not really arguing anything that Gramscian and neoGramscian theorists of International Political Economy, like Stephen Gill, Robert Cox, and Mark Rupert, have not been claiming for at least the last decade. If anything, Nitzan and Bichler’s research fits nicely within this overall and already well-established perspective.

Of course, the same criticisms that are levelled at Gramscian/neoGramscian scholars situated precariously within the Marxist perspective can be directed at Nitzan and Bichler: those of economic determinism and the conspiratorial nature of their theories. In terms of economic determinism, for Nitzan and Bichler, everything is about money and how capitalists can materially gain from even the most unstable of circumstances. Hence, even fundamental issues of war and peace are reduced to nothing more than the economic interests of Israeli capitalists. Even the 1993 Oslo Accord was principally a business decision motivated by the desire of Israel’s economic elite to more fully participate in the newly globalizing economy by announcing to the world that Israel was now a stable place to invest and, thus, “open for business” (337). As for the conspiratorial nature of many of their arguments, it is not that the book is not well researched and well documented, but like most conspiracy theories, conclusions are reached a priori. They claim Israeli capitalists got wealthy from stagflation that threatened social peace and an escalating cycle of energy crises and increased arms trades that threatened regional instability. While they may have become rich, to argue that the capitalists controlled these processes is problematic at best and grand treason at worst, especially considering both the low probability of success and the fact that they placed their entire country and its very survival and security at risk.

In the end, *The Global Political Economy of Israel* definitely provides a wealth of information and is a very interesting read, but a person does not need to buy the cow when they can get the milk for free.

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CIA et Jihad 1950-2001. Contre l’URSS, une désastreuse alliance

John K. Cooley

Collection « Frontières »

Paris: Autrement, 2002, 287 p.

Dans son livre *CIA et Jihad, 1950-2001*, le journaliste John K. Cooley identifie l’invasion de l’Afghanistan par l’Union soviétique, en 1979, comme le premier maillon de la sinistre chaîne qui a mené les États-Unis à la crise consécutive au 11 septembre 2001. Écrit en 1998, puis actualisé et réédité en 2001, ce livre, empruntant au récit d’aventure, nous présente une analyse détaillée des relations que la CIA entretient avec les groupes islamistes « jihadistes » les plus radicaux afin de combattre le communisme (L’empire de l’athéisme) durant la guerre froide dans les pays musulmans. L’islamisme activiste était durant le système bipolaire, un cheval de bataille des stratégies américaines. En tout cas, selon Cooley, la fin de l’occupation soviétique de l’Afghanistan serait le prélude d’une confrontation rude et meurtrière entre la puissance américaine et la mouvance islamiste.

À l’origine, les Américains font alliance avec les islamistes autour des enjeux pétroliers, des routes commerciales, de la géostratégie de la guerre froide mais, surtout, selon Cooley, afin de libérer l’Islam du joug communiste (p. 29). L’auteur ajoute que la vision romantique de la lutte qui s’amorce est faussée par l’équation trop simpliste que posent les Américains entre nationalisme islamisto-arabe et communisme soviétique.