



Book Reviews

Hugh Culley, *The Immortal Class: Bike Messengers and the Cult of Human Power*. New York: Random House, 2002.

This is an excellent book that recounts the author's experience of working as a bike messenger in Chicago. The book can be described in three ways: a wonderfully rich autoethnography of an urban icon, the bike messenger; a poetic analysis of contemporary urbanism under capitalism in the US; and a political memoir that concretely depicts urban politics as a politics of space. The author challenges readers to "consider that in the overproduction of big media ... we may have overlooked the cult of human power that is reclaiming public space and giving it back to average people" (p xxii). This "cult" comprises people who choose bicycling as a legitimate mode of transportation in the city and bike messengers for whom cycling means both employment and a way of life. Some readers may find this challenge rather simplistically conceptualized, but it is important to recognize that the book has no pretensions of being an academic text. Yet, by the end of *The Immortal Class* readers will find that this initial conceptual looseness is overcome and that Culley actually offers an insightful analysis of urban processes coupled with a clear commitment to spatial justice.

What is most impressive about Culley's book is the way it exceeds the potentially limited, if intriguing, confines of the subject suggested by its title. More than an ethnographic description of working as a bike messenger, Culley convincingly connects the labor performed by bike couriers with broader processes of urban capital accumulation and spatial politics. Some of the broader issues he lucidly describes include class and race politics, the history of urban planning, and the rise of the private automobile and its consequences for urban public space. His observations of the workings of the city and capital are achieved through wonderfully poetic prose that offer a lively first hand account of the realities of life at work as a bike messenger on the streets of contemporary Chicago. Furthermore, Culley's book provides a pragmatic depiction of the ability of people to reclaim and redemocratize the streets without overly romanticizing the book's principle subjects. The book is a ripping good read for urban, cultural, and political geographers and would be an excellent pedagogical compliment in upper level undergraduate courses or graduate seminars.

The Immortal Class comprises twelve chapters that can be divided into two parts. The first half of the book concentrates on the personal history that brought the author to take a job as a bike messenger. An art school graduate, Culley has been working as a museum installation builder. While riding his bike to work one day, he is struck by a cab, left badly injured and unable to work. Already on the margins of poverty and lacking health insurance, Culley finds himself unable to pay for adequate medical attention. It is through this experience that he begins to turn a critical eye toward the city he had once seen more as an aesthetic object.

After recovering, Culley is unable to find steady employment and out of necessity takes a job as a bike messenger. In describing his experience, Culley begins to connect the daily work routines of bike messengers to broader topics such as class and racial politics, inequality, the “motorization” of the American city, urban planning, and the social and legal production of urban space under capitalism. These issues are taken on in greater detail in the second half of the book, which geographers will find of most interest.

Beginning in chapter 6, Culley turns from describing the work routines of bike messengers to an overtly political analysis of the consequences for urban public space wrought by the automobile. Culley takes the bicycle as a technology and bicycling as a practice that can literally reshape and redemocratize the city as public space. Couriers, he argues, are “committed to the development of a single day’s work in the city, spinning through the machine while their legs transform into airplane cables and hydraulic cylinders moving around a series of titanium disks” (p 153). Culley describes the labor of bike couriers as critical to the circulation of information in the city and hence the reproduction of urban capital. His depictions of the bodily demands of working as a bike messenger evokes in gritty, riveting detail the abstractions of capital accumulation theory. Descriptive passages of the city’s inhabitants as “projected in electric currents through copper wires, radio waves, and telephone lines” (p 154) or riding the streets on a courier bike as “exercising a specific kind of kinetic intelligence [in order] to have an out for every obstacle in a perfectly unpredictable blur of movement” (p 155) evoke the city as space in motion, as capital in circulation. Culley dramatically brings to life the labor of human bodies in broader processes of urban capital accumulation and its contradictions.

In this chapter he also begins to discuss the legal construction of the city’s streets as the (nearly) exclusive domain of motor vehicles and the challenge to this exclusivity made by the Critical Mass movement. Critical Mass rides are an international grass roots phenomenon in which large groups of cyclists gather in a festival atmosphere once a month and ride a designated route through city streets. By blocking traffic, “the mass” momentarily reclaims the street from the individualism of the automobile and raises awareness of bicycling as a legitimate transportation choice. Here Culley depicts the politics of Critical Mass rides as conscious reclamations of the streets as public space. In subsequent chapters (especially chapter 10) he describes his involvement in organizing these events and suggests their importance in terms of bridging class and racial divides in the city.

Chapter 7 offers a good overview of the urban planning of Chicago through the twentieth century. Culley pays particular attention to the physical changes that have had to be made to Daniel Burnham’s 1909 city plan in order to literally reshape the city to accommodate the automobile. For Culley, the reshaping of Chicago is emblematic of the increasingly unequal, undemocratic appropriation of public space by the state and its privatization by capital. He argues that “[b]eyond simply mobilizing the affluent, the automobile has actually shaped the city around its use in order to make the car a competitive necessity in the American workforce” (p 199). Culley convincingly demonstrates that the automobile has become a “forced demand” (p 199) in the American city. Through this discussion, Culley draws a vivid picture that links planning for automobiles, and the forced demand for them, to oil dependence and unequal international divisions of production and consumption.

Class politics as spatial politics is a strong theme throughout the book. However, Culley also offers insights into urban spatial politics by paying attention to the

importance of race. This theme is hinted at early in the book but remains rather muted until the final two chapters. Here, Culley turns his attention to the infamous death of Thomas McBride, a Chicago bike courier whom Culley knew personally. McBride's death came to national attention in the US after he was deliberately run down by an SUV driven by Carnell Fitzpatrick, an African American. In December 2001 Fitzpatrick was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to 45 years in prison. Culley uses this event to underscore his critique of automobile dominated streets, but he also uses it to consider the role of the automobile in the ghettoization of Chicago and the production of racialized geographies of poverty and inequality in the city more generally. It is in the surprising climax of the book that Culley turns a critical eye to himself as members of Fitzpatrick's family confront the author as he is participating in a Critical Mass ride in McBride's honor. This sobering confrontation forces Culley to reexamine his sometimes romanticized view of the ability of the Critical Mass movement to bridge both social and racial divides in the city. Ultimately he is left hopeful, though more conscious of the magnitude of changes necessary to achieve a more just city.

The Immortal Class is not without its weaknesses. The valorization of bike messengers apparent in the book's title occasionally paints couriers in general, and Culley specifically, as having a privileged critical eye on the city. Early in the book Culley consciously positions himself as offering a perspective on urban life that is outside the academy as well as the confines of corporate employment. For example, he states, "my eyes have grown tired of fanning over as many as a million people in a single day ... While these masses groan over the decisions they have made and the responsibilities they have undertaken, I float above ... As an uncommon laborer I may not amount to much in their eyes, but I am free ... of the weekday treadmill routine" (pp 6–7). Fortunately, this assumption of privileged insight into the machinations of urban capital accumulation becomes more muted as the book progresses. To Culley's credit, his initial hubris becomes tempered by a more reflexive self-consciousness of his own participation in the processes of capital production and reproduction as they are expressed in the urban space of Chicago. *The Immortal Class* is also weak on the issue of gender. Culley only occasionally acknowledges that being male has important consequences for how he experienced the city and working as a bike messenger. The experience of female bike messengers is respectfully drawn attention to but only peripherally. Indeed, the main female figures in the book are Culley's mother and occasional girlfriends, all of whom are depicted in positions of support to Culley's work life. The book also ends with a rather curious gendering of the city itself as a mysterious and alluring woman that Culley has "mapped into the back of [his] mind" (p 324). In my opinion, given that Culley clearly presents his book as a personal perspective and makes no claims to academic rigor these weaknesses are not fatal. Rather, in a classroom setting they would offer excellent jumping off points for discussions of subjectivity and the production of urban space.

JOSH LEPAWSKY

Department of Geography

University of Kentucky

Lexington, KY

USA

jllepa2@uky.edu

NGOs and Grassroots Politics: Hegemonic Development in an era of Neo-liberal Globalization

Sangeeta Kamat, *Development Hegemony: NGOs and the State in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

In many parts of the “global South” the last decade has witnessed a vigorous debate on the roles that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in shaping grassroots politics. Much of contemporary development theory, however, has continued to view NGOs as potential agents for diffusing development, without considering how even seemingly politicized NGOs might diffuse ideologies and practices that depoliticize development and social life more broadly, thus undermining the solidarity of marginalized groups and limiting their ability to struggle for broader social justice. In her compelling book, *Development Hegemony: NGOs and the State in India*, Sangeeta Kamat provides a new analytical and political framework that insists on interweaving these themes by placing the praxis of grassroots organizations at its core and by systematically exploring the mechanisms by which development ideology is reproduced within resistant spaces of political action. Kamat is concerned with a crucial paradox of the current political scene “where the organizational forms are numerous and varied, but the discourse of change appears rather narrow and issue oriented” (p x). She conducts an institutional ethnography of one NGO in Maharashtra (India) to explore how micro practices of grassroots empowerment and resistance can strengthen macro practices of domination. In so doing, she presents a nuanced conceptualization of NGOs and grassroots social activism that effectively challenges the prevailing tendency to simplistically interpret them either as service contractors, or as manifestations of countervailing power and enhanced democracy.

Kamat argues, “development ideology is reproduced through its articulation with universalizing discourses of the modern state, such as nationalism and secularism, whose legitimacy is left unchallenged in the critiques against development” (p 3). She locates this process of articulation not only in the state apparatus, but equally in the particular histories, ideologies and traditions of the intellectual class that is active at the grassroots. Her approach is to analyze the histories and social practices of an NGO working among *adivasis*.¹ Kamat identifies four discursive moments that play a critical role in aligning the discourse of social transformation at the grassroots with the statist discourse of development, modernization, and nationalism: the separation of the economic from the political, commodity fetishism, reification of the state, and the individualization of social relations of production. By reproducing fundamental features of the development discourse, these four moments undermine the possibility of a counter-hegemonic discourse of democracy, equity and justice and produce the *NGOization of grassroots politics*.

The first chapter briefly reviews the fissured landscape of development and the emergence of voluntary organizations, NGOs, and grassroots groups as non-party political formations challenging mainstream development and advancing their own views. The second chapter outlines Kamat’s theoretical approach to the state and civil society in this context and provides a methodological overview. She employs a Gramscian notion of the state and civil society as imbricated in one another. Drawing on scholars such as Evans and Skocpol and Habermas, she works from a

position that the state has relative autonomy from capitalist classes. She approaches the question of hegemony by operationalizing Foucauldian notions of productive power and discourse through an institutional ethnography of a grassroots NGO.

The heart of the book (chapters 3–5) comprises the case study where Kamat reads “the discursive and material practices of the lead actors of a grassroots organization for how these practices relate to dominant ideologies and statist discourses of citizenship, rights, democracy, modernity, and the extent to which these are challenged or framed in new ways” (p 43). The actors at the center of this study are Ajay and Sujata, a socialist couple from Mumbai who moved to the husband’s ancestral village to address the gross inequalities in the village through community work. They set up a health clinic and a daycare facility for landless and poor peasants, and registered their organization as a charitable trust called the *Sansad*. Although both the landed peasantry and petty government officials encouraged their charitable work, few of the village poor used their services. The *Sansad* encountered the limits of development when Ajay and Sujata discovered bonded labor (which is illegal) in the village and began a struggle to free the *adivasis* from debt bondage to local landlords. The state agencies in the region, allied with landlords, became hostile and a national development funding agency declared this work political, and found the *Sansad*’s participation illegal. The couple then set up a second organization, the *Sanghatna*, to pursue the struggle, but without state support.

Kamat highlights the heterogeneous and contradictory position of the state, where key elements of the central government acting as guarantors of justice for all under the law, denounced debt bondage, while the political economy of the state and district levels of government allied officials with landlords. Eventually, the bonded laborers were freed, and Ajay and Sujata now felt an urgent need to help them find new livelihoods. The avenue open for this was to engage in development work through the *Sansad*.

The *Sansad*’s development work was apolitical in more than one sense. To begin with, it could not do anything that state agencies would regard as political. In taking on development projects, it accepted the terms of the orthodox development discourse. Most importantly, the *Sansad* was confined to speak in terms of needs and absences within individuals, with no reference to the social relations that gave rise to them: “The strategy of development is one of positioning a discursive framework, falling into which, any social issue will be magically emptied of its social relations that constitute it, to assume a reified form” (p 66). This erasure of social relations diffuses the potential for conflict and political action, while simultaneously casting problems as technical issues to be addressed by expert knowledge.

Kamat uses the example of the *Sansad*’s dairy project (chapter 4) to show how a reification of the social, or the “freeze-drying of social relations into things”, led to commodity fetishism. In one example, the dairy cow was constructed as a generator of wealth, independent of the social relations in which the cow and its owner were embedded. Wealth was to come from following proper technical procedures for handling the cow and milk. As the project failed, households were blamed for failing to meet the requirements of cow care, despite the fact that the state reneged on its promise to provide a market for milk.

While the *Sansad* depoliticized uneven development by *reifying* the social, the *Sanghatna* was to carry on the political struggle and *socialize* the social. In following the *Sanghatna*, Kamat addresses how it challenged an increasingly capitalist

state, and highlights the articulation between the *Sanghatna's* political work and the *Sansad's* economic activity (chapter 5). She observes that the *Sanghatna* focused on pushing the state to enforce its laws equally. While this helped to undermine precapitalist forms of domination and exploitation, it also enhanced the legitimacy of the state and capitalist development, and closed off avenues for struggle against inequalities embedded in the state itself. Kamat further illustrates how the *Sanghatna's* pedagogical/educational work reinforced the idea of a modern subject, one that faulted *adivasi* culture and created a hierarchy between *sudharit* (“improved”) versus “backward” *adivasi*.

The book concludes by summarizing the lessons from the case study, exploring their implications for reconceptualizing NGOs, and evaluating NGOs' role in an era of neoliberal globalization. The exclusion of politics from development activities meant that the *Sansad/Sanghatna* could not support the *adivasi* in class struggle over central issues such as land redistribution, fair working relations and wages, and struggles over forests and forest products, water, and all elements pertaining to the forces of production and reproduction. Instead, the organization posed the problem as one of class position, which could be transformed through addressing “needs” and “absences” without addressing the social forces that shaped them (p 155). Furthermore, development projects were characterized by a technological determinism and hierarchy of knowledge with experts on top, and the individualization of the subject, which in turn divided the working class into some individuals who could benefit and many who could not. The result was to foster the values of economic rationality, which compete with collective identity, solidarity and collective struggle.

The *Sanghatna's* work acted to legitimize the state, even though the state's promise of equal protection under the law in the midst of actual inequality translated into a promise to protect these inequalities (p 156). Expressing political and economic citizenship as universally binding—and, therefore, fair—limits the ability of civil society organizations to undermine consent to existing unequal relations. The state deploys outright repression of organizations that do not subscribe to the political forms of the liberal capitalist state, or persuades and coerces organizations to adopt development programs. In as much as the *Sansad/Sanghatna* operated within acceptable state practices and paid little attention to the place of *adivasi* culture in building solidarity, it worked to facilitate a modern individualistic identity, rather than a culturally grounded class identity.

Kamat proposes that we label NGOs as “those organizations that engender a corporatist identity among their members, that work within the existing political forms of the state, and do not facilitate a reinterpretation of the material basis for a collective identity” (p 161). By focusing on the kinds of activities and consciousness that NGOs promote, Kamat's definition clarifies why international capital and the state support NGOs and how NGOs, in turn, compromise non-party Left activity. Not surprisingly, grassroots organizations are increasingly compelled to play the role of NGO as their relative autonomy—their capacity to sustain themselves and determine their own projects and strategy—is greatly circumscribed by their increased dependence on funding by international capital and the state. Conversely, they seem to be more autonomous from those interests they claim to represent. In the context of tight competition for funding under the regime of neoliberal globalization, Kamat foresees the consolidation of the NGO sector into a small number of large corporate-like structures with a highly professional staff and low paid grassroots workers coordinating select economic enterprises

over different regions (p 166). Thus, far from symbolizing devolution of power from the state to the public, the structure and praxis of NGOs may contribute to reproducing the status quo (p 167).

While Kamat does not specifically engage with geographical writing on development, her analysis of the NGOization of grassroots politics hinges on scale and geographical context. She starts with the broad problem of how to think about the sociopolitical role(s) of contemporary NGOs, and deploys her case study to extend contemporary theorizations of NGOs, and the ways they are shaped by intersecting processes at multiple geographical scales. Implicit throughout, *Development Hegemony* is an argument for a need to go beyond generalized representations of popular efforts against mainstream development paradigms, and to present analyses that are grounded in the origin, history, and direction of political resistance. Although the theoretical framework of the book is laid out somewhat sketchily, we do not see its primary purpose as explicating theories produced by Marx, Gramsci, or Foucault. Rather, Kamat's creative interpretation and deployment of these theories opens up new possibilities to evaluate the work of organizations on the ground.

An obvious way to extend Kamat's analysis is to bring her insights into conversation with the context-specific praxis of particular development organizations. Methodologically, her examination stimulates us to imagine new ways to collaborate with organizations and social movements. Also, while Kamat does not engage prominently with feminist concerns, her discussion of the production of modern subjects through a depoliticization of "empowerment" discourse opens up critical questions for feminist scholars with profound implications for their theoretical and methodological frameworks. *Development Hegemony* is essential reading for all scholars of development, globalization, and social movements across the social sciences (ranging upward from the advanced undergraduate level), as well as for practitioners interested in grassroots actions, and their relationships to larger processes. Kamat inspires us to imagine future intellectual and political interventions that can produce new cracks in development hegemony, and interrupt the processes that lead to the NGOization of grassroots politics.

DAVID R FAUST

Department of Geography

University of Minnesota

Minneapolis, MN

USA

faust011@umn.edu

RICHA NAGAR

Department of Women's Studies

University of Minnesota

Minneapolis, MN

USA

nagar002@umn.edu

Endnote

¹*Adivasi*, or original inhabitants, is a more politicized term for relatively distinctive cultural/ethnic groups officially classified as *Tribal*.

J Nitzan and S Bichler, *The Global Political Economy of Israel*. London: Pluto Press, 2002.

Economics is nothing other than plain politics. Perhaps this is the key remark that Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler wished to highlight in *The Global Political Economy of Israel*. In other words, economics and politics are artificially separated for scientific purposes. In order to break this separation, Nitzan and Bichler went into an in-depth study of the capitalization of power and the formation of a core group of “dominant capital” in Israel, from the colonial occupation, all the way through the welfare state and to the globalization.

Nitzan and Bichler dedicate the main body of their empirical research to providing evidence that the emergence of Zionist sovereign entity, the political conflicts in the Middle East and the attempts to achieve a peace agreement are actually the story of capital accumulation in Israel, as well as the formation of a ruling dominant class. Capital, they argue, is a form of power, mainly institutional power, and that power is both the means and the end of accumulation. The interest of the Israeli ruling class is embedded in and interconnected with dominant world capitalism, mainly the American big economy of the Weapondollar–Petrodollar coalition. Into this single story, the authors interweave wider aspects of the history of Israel and Zionism, reviewed chronologically from its early stage in the 1930s until the recent globalization stage in the 1990s. By doing so, they bring to the fore the central thesis of the book, which is that the formation of a capitalist ruling class should be seen as a process of occupying the key nodes of governmental and military power.

The book starts with a short introduction and a theoretical chapter, which aims to break the “conventional wisdom” on the dualism of economics and politics. The four subsequent chapters are dedicated to empirical research on the capitalization of power and the occupation of key nodes of power in the Israeli–Zionist history. The third chapter in the book focuses on the early stage of accumulation and the emergence of a ruling class in Israel before and after World War I, hand in hand with the formation of a Zionist political entity with its own bureaucratic elite. Together, they formed a kind of a corporation core, consisting of government, army and capital, which led to an independent state in 1948. The state, in this sense, is the setting up of power institutions “with its various allocation rules, social arrangements, ideological conventions and disciplinary means, it helps generate and regulate profit expectations, which can be discounted into capital” (p 105). The establishment of the state of Israel promoted the Israeli core-corporations that were situated at the center. The promotion includes expropriation and redistribution of Palestinian land and property, absorption of Jewish immigrants and their conversion into an obedient and low-cost labor force, transformation of massive capital from Germany (in compensation for the Holocaust), governmental control over the labor union and proletarianization of over one million Palestinians in the occupied territories after the war in 1967.

The chapter that follows tracks the history of inflation and stagflation in Israel during the 1970s and 1980s and it brings up the idea that inflation and stagflation are techniques for capitalist development and differential accumulation. The rise in oil prices during the 1970s contributed to the evolution of inflation and stagflation all over the world. This idea directs the book to its fifth chapter, which deals with the Weapondollar–Petrodollar coalition and the conflict in the Middle East. According

to Nitzan and Bichler, since the US intervention in Vietnam, a group of American firms, “which appropriated the lion’s share of defense-related contracts” (p 209), promoted its businesses during the 1970s energy crisis and the instability in the Middle East. The Middle East became the world’s leading market for imported weapons. In order to pay for this weaponry, the price of oil was increased for the benefit of (mostly American) oil firms. Israel, as an importer of weaponry (which was subsidized by the American government), was a vital player in this recycling of profit and as a maintainer of military tension in the region, mainly after the revolution in Iran. Within this conflict and American support, Israel’s dominant class enjoyed differential accumulation, which will set this class into the process of transnationalism and global accumulation one decade later. However, this stage ended during the 1980s. The effort to revive the Weapondollar–Petrodollar coalition in the early 1990s in the Gulf war by US government, partly failed.

The last chapter in the book is devoted to the progressive integration of the Israeli ruling class into the global political economy. The regional conflict, which linked Israeli and US capitalist groups, came to an end. But the relationship between these two groups got closer, as many of Israel’s leading firms were transnationalized, ie they were taken over by foreign investors. A new Technodollar–Mergerdollar coalition (high technology and corporate amalgamation) emerged, and Israel earned a chance to become the “Silicon Wady of the Middle East” (p 29). These processes went in tandem with the new “Washington Consensus”, which boosted the peace process in the Middle East. The Israeli ruling class finally realized that the occupation of Palestinian land prevents its integration into the global accumulation process, and that the benefit derived from the occupation is lower than the expenses associated with controlling the land and people by military forces. These were the reasons behind the agreement to negotiate with the Palestinians. Nevertheless, Nitzan and Bichler claim, “once the peace process started and the globalisation wagon began rolling ... the Zionist package began to unravel” (p 355) and these processes mark the beginning of the end of Zionism (p 354), ushering the end of the Israeli nation-state. Nevertheless, after September 11, with Bush in the White House, Sharon the prime minister in Israel and the “new economy” a fly-by-night phenomenon, a last attempt is made in Afghanistan (and probably, Nitzan and Bichler would claim, in Iraq too) to revive the Weapondollar–Petrodollar coalition by awakening the devil of war in the Middle East.

It is easy to get trapped in the web of silk threads that Nitzan and Bichler interweave in this fascinating manuscript on international politics and national–global capitalism. They rewrite the history of Zionism and Israel from its early stage, from a very unique point of view. The rewriting includes most of the big, well known events, mingled with much of the political corruption that was published at the time in the newspapers. Juxtaposing the big events and the corruption in a non-parallel historical story enables the authors to present a very convincing structure, with a well organized internal logic, where most of the components are familiar to the readers, at least to the Israelis amongst them. What makes the story new are the links and the placing of the focal point on the ruling class. According to this specific focal point, “history” is the realization of the dreams of the Israeli ruling class. These dreams are coordinated with those of other ruling classes in other states, mainly that of the US, and, together, they advance their own dreams and those of other ruling classes. Nationalism, ethnicity, culture and

the vast majority of the population are nothing but wheels on the wagon of the ruling classes, and these wheels are also made by the ruling classes.

“Power”, however, is full of twists and turns. It runs through numerous elusive channels, and it is much more multifarious than described by Nizan and Bichler, because everyone in society possesses some type of power. Hence, power should not be relegated to a single direction or dimension, in which one specific class dominates society, politics and even history. I would like to illustrate my critical point with two examples from the late history of Israel. The two cases demonstrate how territorial ideology and nationalism construct a “power from below” that often operates against the stichometric power described in the reviewed book. Yet, I should explain Nizan and Bichler’s understanding of the relationship between capital, nation-state, and territory before entering into my own argument: Both are well aware of the debate over the role of the state and of nationalism in the emergence of capitalism and accumulation. For them “Capital itself can be seen as an emergent form of state” (p 13). “Capital as state” reveals the process beginning when capitalization was reliant on the power of the nation-state, and concluding when capital exceeds the state, seeking to integrate itself into the transnational structure of accumulation. They argue that the final stage symbolizes the end of territoriality, since “develop into a global state, territory would clearly cease to be defining nature” (p 13). Concerning Israel, the argument implies that the ambition of Israeli big businesses is to integrate into the global accumulation process, a trend that cannot be disturbed by territorial considerations, nationalism or any other form of power. This ambition requires achieving a peace agreement with the Arab world and relinquishing occupied territory conquered in 1967. In the 1990s it should not have been seen as a major “casualty”, because “for dominant capital ... peace was of course a bonanza” (p 349).

The main issue is that Nizan and Bichler’s analysis regarding the ceding of territoriality as part of the integration of domestic capital into global accumulation is tested on the Israeli settler society. The two examples that I wish to illustrate closely relate to the effort to achieve peace in the Middle East. Both highlight the problematic character of the argument regarding the ceding of territoriality along with the description of power as having single dimension and direction:

(a) Prime Minister Ehud Barak pushed tirelessly for peace with the Arab world in order to advance Israel into the high-technology businesses, thereby gaining the country some “peace dividends”. Yet, the Prime Minister did reject peace plans vis-à-vis Syria at the end of the 1990s. The reason behind the refusal was a “principle objection” to the transfer of several hundred meters of land in the slopes of the occupied Golan Height, near the Sea of Galilee. Actually, an extensive public protest movement, embodied by the slogan “The People with the Golan Height”, managed to prevent any territorial “concession”, thereby blocking the potential peace agreement with Syria against the will of the Israeli big economy.

(b) An Israeli citizen, indoctrinated by a thick fundamentalist-colonialist ideology and possessing indirect political support, assassinated Prime Minister Rabin in 1995. Rabin had previously expressed a readiness to return parts of Israel’s “holy land” to the Palestinians. Understandably, Rabin was assuredly a political favorite of the ruling class, according to Nizan and Bichler. Several months following the assassination, the Israeli electorate deposed Prime Minister Shimon Peres, another preferred leader of the ruling class. He headed and was continuing to negotiate a peace with the Palestinian people. Paradoxically, all these events took place when

Israel became the “Silicon Wady of the Middle East” (p 29)—when it entered into the phase of global accumulation.

These two illustrations reveal that territory and territorial ideologies are both defining natures. Furthermore, it is clear that the politics of Israel, as well as those of other states, are subjected to the needs of the “big economy” and in the long run the capitalists shape the course of history. However, this “subjugation” does not portray the entire reality. When politics comes down to questions of territoriality and ideology, power is not a monopolistic resource owned by the ruling class. Sometimes other “interests”, disconnected from the ruling class, also influence the course of the history.

Nevertheless, if the readers consider these problematic points, than *The Global Political Economy of Israel* is one of the most important books on political economics. It presents a critical and coherent picture of Israel’s development from the “national” phase to the global and manages to derive insights on the forms of making a ruling class. For that reason, the book is not only for Israeli readers. The book can be addressed to researchers and students of political and social geography all over the world, who are interested in state theory and in processes of accumulation and globalization, mainly in relation to the intensification of multi-national corporations and transnational capitalism.

EREZ TZFADIA

Department of Geography

Hebrew University

Jerusalem

Israel

tzfadia@mail.bgu.ac.il