

## Books and Articles Reviews

Lorenzo Kamel<sup>379</sup>

**Miodownik, Dan (co-authors: Ravi Bhavnani, Hyun Jin Choi), *Three Two Tango: Territorial Control and Selective Violence in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza*.**<sup>380</sup>

Miodownik's article falls into the research area of identifying "causes of violence against civilians in a civil war" (Miodownik 2010, 6). However, while this literature usually deals with two actors with relatively symmetric capabilities, Miodownik challenges this assumption and deals with a case study of three actors with asymmetric capabilities: the case of Israel, Fatah and Hamas. Miodownik starts his article by introducing the theory of Kalyvas, according to which under the condition of two actors, violence will be most likely in areas of incomplete control, meaning for the Israeli-Palestinian case in Area C (incomplete Israeli control) and Area A (incomplete Palestinian control), not however in within-Green line Israel, in jointly Israeli-Palestinian governed Area B and in Hamas governed Gaza. Miodownik's data show that from 1987 to 2005, Kalyvas' projections indeed apply to the Israeli-Palestinian case: most violence occurred in Area C and Area A.

However, in 2006, Hamas gained control over Gaza and subsequently there are three actors involved. Miodownik's data show that after 2006 violence perpetrated by Israel shifts to Area A and Hamas governed Gaza. With an agent-based computational model, the author shows that between 2006 and 2008, 33% of all killings took place in Gaza and 63.3% took place in Area A. Only 3.4% of all killings happened in Area B and no violence occurred in Area C and within-Green line Israel (Miodownik 2010, 15).

So, in triadic, asymmetric wars, "violence is more likely to occur in areas incompletely controlled by the weaker side" (Miodownik 2010, 17). Furthermore, regarding Palestinian violence, the author finds that Palestinian violence is more likely in the zone of incomplete Palestinian control (Area A) than in the area of complete Palestinian control (Gaza) – however, fatalities tend

---

<sup>379</sup> Le presenti recensioni, cui seguiranno altre nei prossimi numeri, sono state redatte dall'autore durante la sua recente permanenza presso la Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

<sup>380</sup> The article has been published on February 2011: Dan Miodownik, Ravi Bhavnani and Jin-Choi Hyun, «Journal of Conflict Resolution», vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 133-158.

to be higher in Gaza than in Area A, meaning that violence here is less targeted and more indiscriminate. Miodownik explains his findings by the split between Fatah and Hamas which “created opportunities for Israel to divide and rule” (Miodownik 2010, 20). Israel let Palestinian security forces trained in Jordan into Area A to destroy Hamas infrastructure there.

Miodownik’s article touches a theoretically, as well as practically very pressing topic and is thus of high relevance. He uses an impressive amount of data and his agent-based computational model seems very appropriate for testing his hypotheses. Also his findings are highly interesting and my critique for this article is far outweighed by all these factors just mentioned.

First of all, the structure of the article seems sometimes slightly confusing for the reader. The author immediately starts with a discussion of Kalyvas’ theory instead of shortly describing what the general state of the art is and what is missing there. Also in the beginning, he should already refer to the aims of his study and sum up the major findings which are in contrast to present findings in the literature. Furthermore, Miodownik could better explain why he chose to study the Israeli-Palestinian case, which is a great choice for testing his theory, but is never explicitly defended. He could also possibly compare the Israeli-Palestinian case to other cases of triadic or asymmetric civil wars like Colombia or Apartheid South Africa. Another problem which he could address better is that contrary to cases like Colombia, Myanmar or Lebanon, the Israeli-Palestinian case is not a case of civil war. Thus, in other cases of triadic warfare, possibly different patterns could emerge, especially when dealing with such causal mechanisms such as denunciations.

Besides, in the regression analysis, possible other factors are raised, which could be better explained. Altitude, for example, which turns out to be statistically significant and is used to control for rough terrain, seems a questionable variable to indeed control for rough terrain. It leaves the reader puzzled why higher or lower places would offer better possibilities for hideouts. In general, all these control variables could be better explained and discussed.

Also, the author’s discussion of the findings could have been more extensive by maybe including also more qualitative research. Basically, the discussion is more informed by assumptions of what could be the causal mechanisms than by deeper qualitative research, which could have further backed up his results, and which could qualify his findings in respect to possible other case studies.

**Peled, Alon, "Traversing Digital Babel", Paper submitted to Public Administration Review (forthcoming 2011)**

In his paper, Alon Peled deals with the question of "how can we incentivize public institutions to share information more effectively?" (Peled 2010, 2). He proposes three key ideas to answer this question: the primacy of bureaucracy over technology, the automatization of bureaucratic language, and the monetization of information-sharing transactions. After sketching the successes and failures of information-sharing project, he briefly identifies the reasons for the failures on three levels: the political level, meaning that actors seek to keep their information in order to hold on to their power; the managerial level, meaning that managers failed to think about an architectural program before; and the archeological level, meaning that in face of the vast information, computer systems acquire their own life and become uncontrollable.

He then lays out his arguments for the three above identified key ideas on basis of immense empirical knowledge in this complex area, which represents a big advantage of this article. In addition and based on this empirical knowledge, the author seems to offer some "fresh" ideas to policy makers: in the area of information-trading, for example, he proposes ideas to foster information brokerage through focusing on concrete public goods, through empowering an agency "to develop a starter data-set that holds valuable information for other organizations" (Peled 2010, 19) and through expanding the information marketplace to address neighboring problems.

However, this huge empirical knowledge seems to come at the price of theory generation. The article seems to be mainly policy-consulting oriented and contributes less to theory in the area. This is the major problem of the article, which already becomes clear in the beginning. The author identifies that the sharing of security information could have prevented 9/11 and that the 2009 Christmas airline attack showed that nothing much has improved yet, notwithstanding this external shock. This, indeed, is a very relevant finding. However, the appropriate research question to such a finding is the question of "why do bureaucracies fail to cooperate?" not "how can we incentivize them to cooperate?". The latter question responds to the identification of incentive problems, which lead to the cooperation failure. This means, the author first would have to outline where exactly this lack of incentive lies, which is hardly analyzed in the article. To the contrary, the author only refers to this on barely one and a half pages. Without a deeper analysis, however, the article can hardly proceed to answer such a question. Such an analysis would have to include

thoroughly political questions, which the article sometimes touches, but not sufficiently.

Secondly, the article in parts lacks structure, which makes it difficult for the reader to follow the thread that runs through the article. Most basically, the introduction should refer to how the author will proceed, already. Subsequently, it could be better structured, as well. In this context, also the figure on page 3 is vague and makes the reader wonder what the author means by it, as he does not explain the use of it at all. To the contrary he mentions dimensions in there, which are hardly discussed afterwards.

One such dimension – and here lies the third problem of the article – is the ethical dimension, which he hardly discusses, except for in a small paragraph on pages 22-23. This, however, seems to be an essential question to address when dealing with the centralization of information about the individual, which always implies a violation of the individual's freedom. The author himself once refers to the great "infocrator" (Peled 2010, 8), which represents a mix of the words information, creator and dictator. Such highly relevant questions for a political community cannot be easily abandoned, should be addressed and controversially discussed in the beginning of an article and at least there should also be a reference to the relevant literature in this respect. Then, also the arguments for information sharing such as the saving of tax payer's money or the protection of the community could be better bundled instead of being spread throughout the article and leaving the reader with the task to find them.

In the conclusion, the author compares the biblical tower of Babel to the electronic tower of Babel, which is a brilliant metaphor. However, again, the author only relates this to the question of how for the builders of the tower, questions of technology resumed priority and – according to Peled – "the same sins lie at the root of many public computer projects" (Peled 2010, 24). This is again true, but not only in the way how Peled intends to use this metaphor. Not only technology, but also the bureaucratic monster, which the German sociologist Max Weber foresaw in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is a sin to a society built on individual freedoms.

**Ira Sharkansky, "The Promised Land of the Chosen People is not all that Distinctive: On the Value of Comparison", 1999, in Levi-Faur, David, Gabriel Sheffer, David Vogel (eds.) "Israel. The Dynamics of Change and Continuity", pp. 279-92.**

In her article, Ira Sharkansky argues that the Israeli idea of being unique does not necessarily reflect reality, but deters self-assessment. These ideas of uniqueness are driven by biblical doctrines, which have been with the Jewish people for thousands of years. However, Sharkansky identifies a danger with this tendency: "The dangers of parochialism lie not only in mistaken commentaries, but in distorted political efforts and misdirected economic concerns" (Sharkansky 1999, 279). So, there might be distorted resource allocations. She also identifies an additional danger: "The centrality of the Promised Land to religious and nationalist Jews produces an intensity and rigidity about issues currently on the national agenda. The vilification of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for bargaining away parts of the Promised Land and his assassination are extreme representations of emotions whose incidence in the population is not possible to gauge accurately" (Sharkansky 1999, 290). Driven by these concerns, Sharkansky sets out to analyse three topics in comparative perspective, for which Israelis assume they are unique: the power and limits of religion, economic and social inequality, and the number of traffic deaths.

Starting with the first, Sharkansky argues that the Jewish state assures indeed an important role for religion. "Founded in 1948 with a declaration of being a Jewish state, Israel stood against the trend of breaking the church-state nexus that had prevailed for more than a century in Europe and North America" (Sharkansky 1999, 280). After describing the main parameters of discussion in Israel about religion and politics, especially also for the city of Jerusalem, she claims that Israel "seems to fit somewhere among other western regimes" (Sharkansky 1999, 284). She justifies this claim by comparing surveys on how religious people perceive themselves, on the dimension of governmental support for religion, and on the prominence of religious symbols in a state.

In terms of income inequality, Sharkansky shortly follows the Israeli discourse on this topic. She then discusses how to measure this concept and acknowledges that it "is no easy task to define or measure economic equality" (Sharkansky 1999, p. 285). Her solution to this problem is the claim that countries with higher GNP (i.e. with higher development) have higher equality; subsequently, GNP becomes one of her measurements. Furthermore, she also

uses the GINI index. As a result, she claims that “Israel is more egalitarian than a number of other countries at or above its level of wealth” (Sharkansky 1999, 287). However, she also acknowledges, that similar to other Western countries, also in Israel inequality is increasing.

Thirdly, she compares Israel to other Western countries in terms of traffic safety and finds that “Israel’s record of road deaths appears to be normal with respect to a groups of countries appropriate for comparison” (Sharkansky 1999, 288).

This article touches a very important field. Indeed, it is important to analyze in a comparative perspective how unique Israel really is, so that resources are allocated properly and so that ideology is removed from politics. The article accomplishes its task in a scientific, quantitative measure. Nonetheless, I would like to argue with two points that the author makes: Firstly, regarding the importance of religion within Israel. Sharkansky claims that other Western states are similar to Israel by comparing level of religiousness, governmental support, and religious symbols. It would be interesting to me to know the reason why she decided to take these measurements. In other words, I am interested in understanding why she took these specific measurements and not others. She herself describes two other important dimensions: the level of tension between secular and religious, which do not exist in other Western countries, and the importance of “Jewish” for the State of Israel. While this is consensus across Jewish Israelis, such a consensus does not exist in Europe, which became most evident in the debate if “Christian values” should be included in a European constitution. Thus, religion does play a much higher role in Israel than in other Western countries. Secondly, she measures equality through economic development. This, however, is a possibly shaky claim, especially when we consider that economic gaps between the rich and the poor in Western countries are increasing with proceeding economic development, as she later on acknowledges herself. In addition, Gross National Product might not be the best measurement for the development of a country, and the Human Development Index could be of much better use for measuring this concept.