

Reviews

Leila

Sarah Irving, *Leila Khaled: Icon of Palestinian Liberation*, Pluto Press, 2012, 168 pages, hardback ISBN 9780745329529, £45, paperback ISBN 9780745329512, £12.99

An account of Leila Khaled's dedicated and inspirational life is long overdue. Sarah Irving's book fills the gap admirably. It is based solidly on Khaled's own accounts of her life in interviews both with the author and others, as well as archival material, newspaper reports and the like.

Sarah Irving's biography of Leila Khaled is as much an account of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, as it is an account of Khaled's life. So it should be. Leila Khaled's life, from an infancy traumatized by the Nakba, through her youth as a refugee driven to militant opposition to theft of her homeland, to her later years in ongoing political activity, has been so closely woven into the Palestinian struggle against occupation and oppression, as to make the two inseparable.

It would be almost impossible to write a biography of Leila Khaled without mention of 'the defining hijackings of 1969 and 1970'. Those are, after all, what brought both Leila Khaled and – as Khaled and her comrades intended – the Palestinian struggle, to world attention. The hijackings did more than that. They also served as inspiration to those engaged in struggles for freedom elsewhere. Far away in the townships of South Africa, for example, Khaled and her comrades became icons of resistance for a generation of oppressed and exploited young people, most of whose own leaders were then murdered, imprisoned, banned and exiled by an apartheid state to which the Israeli state would in years to come be likened.

Irving's book moves swiftly over Khaled's 'iconic' status, notwithstanding the subtitle of the book. As Irving makes clear from the outset, Khaled has been much more than the 'beautiful girl hijacker'. Her life has encompassed the roles of 'wife and mother, teacher and campaigner, member of the Palestinian National Council and leader of the General Union of Palestinian Women'. It has been a life devoted almost exclusively to political and military struggle – both before and since the hijackings.

Khaled was just a little girl of four at the time of the Nakba – the Catastrophe – during which Zionist terrorists began what was to become an ongoing drive to force Palestinians from their homeland. With her family she fled her native Haifa for a refugee camp in Lebanon. Khaled

was not to see Haifa again until she hijacked a plane to make the world aware of her people's sufferings. In the course of the hijacking, she made the pilot fly over Haifa.

Scarcely more than a decade after that forced politicization, fifteen-year-old Khaled became a member of the Arab Nationalist Movement, a branch of which later became the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Khaled trained as one of the PFLP's fighters and it was as such that she engaged in those historic hijackings. The course of Khaled's life as a student, as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother were from the outset determined by what was required of her politically – constantly on the move, constantly under threat, constantly, with those she loved, in danger. Nothing, however, could deter her from giving her all to the struggle of her people, not even the terrible loss of a sister to the terrorists seeking to take Leila Khaled's own life, or the pain of several bouts of plastic surgery which would enable her to continue her political activities in the face of those wishing to kill her.

Over the decades since the seventies, the nature of Khaled's contribution to the Palestinian struggle necessarily changed from a military one to a political one. From soldier and hijacker she moved into political activism in refugee camps and in the women's movement, a leadership role nationally, and becoming an international representative of, and spokesperson for, the movement against the ongoing occupation of Palestine. No longer armed with guns and grenades, she none the less remains a fierce fighter for real freedom for the Palestinian people, rejecting bogus accords and peace processes as well as dummy authorities which fall far short of what she believes in: freedom for the Palestinian people from occupation and oppression, return of their land, the right of all Palestinians to return to their homeland in peace. Just as she inspired those engaged in struggle elsewhere with her militant actions, she continues to do so by her ongoing expressions of support for struggles of oppressed people elsewhere in the world. A true internationalist, Khaled stands not just for social justice for Palestinians, but for social justice for all people.

Now in her sixties, with decades of struggle and many personal sacrifices behind her, Khaled has no intention of retiring from the fight for Palestinian rights. Her commitment to doing all she can to promote the cause of the Palestinian people is undimmed by age. As she says: 'You can't retire from struggle, or from being involved'. *Aluta continua!*

Filled as it is with the twists and turns of the Palestinian liberation movement, and all the organizations and personalities which have comprised it before and during Khaled's lifetime, Irving's book is pretty

dense. But it remains an accessible chronicle of the life of a remarkable woman and the struggle which has been the focal point of that life. As such, it deserves to be read by everyone interested not only in the Palestinian struggle, but also in the struggle against oppression and exploitation everywhere.

My daughter has just returned from a stint as a volunteer in Palestine and is already engrossed in Irving's book. She wants to recommend it to all her fellow volunteers. I am sending a copy to Cape Town, to one of the many Leilas whose parents were amongst those influenced by Leila Khaled.

Shereen Pandit

Downwinders

Kristen Iversen, *Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Shadow of a Secret Nuclear Facility*, Harvill Secker, London, 2012, 416 pages, paperback ISBN 9781846556142, £14.99

The drive south from the eclectic, activist prone, posh parts of Boulder follows the Rocky Mountains, one of the most impressive North American mountain ranges, into the huddled suburbs of Denver: Broomfield, Westminster, Arvada, Golden. In half an hour's drive, looking on the right, one can take in the theatrical peaks of Boulder Mountain Park and the pine covered red rocks of Eldorado Canyon, and on the left, the extended mass of metropolitan Denver, with the city's impressive skyline showcasing its 56-story Republic Plaza and the Qwest Tower. Just before entering the city, the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge catches the eye; home to the threatened Preble's meadow jumping mouse, the refuge seems to fit perfectly in the idyllic setting of one of the most green and environmentally savvy states. Established in 2007, the refuge is yet to be open to the public, since controversy over its nuclear-weapons-plant past and evidence of plutonium and uranium traces in the soil would make anybody think twice before entering the site for a Sunday stroll.

Leaving no stone unturned of the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge's contentious existence, Kristen Iversen brings forth *Full Body Burden*, a memoir of her family's imminent downfall, paralleled with the institutionalised web of lies surrounding Rocky Flats Plant, one of the United States' Cold War legacies.

The family universe is poetically reconstructed and evocative of the television series *Mad Men*: it is the 1960s, dad is a successful lawyer in the

city; mum is a housewife, mother of three and over the moon about the move to the heavenly suburb of Bridledale; the children ride ponies, chase rabbits, have teenage identity crises and first romances. From the family's favourite pastimes, driving through the Colorado Rockies on a Sunday and grown-ups enjoying cocktails in the evening, the latter proves to be more dangerous and leads, within a decade, to the slow-paced, taciturn end of the family, the American dream and the post-war promises; the law practice, the big house, the ponies, the marriage, and the innocence of the children all vanish.

Meanwhile, two miles west, past the strikingly beautiful Standley Lake, the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant is in full production, from 1952 to 1989, manufacturing more than seventy thousand plutonium triggers, the hearts of every nuclear weapon made in America. With a heightened investigative style, Iversen manages to cover in detail the tumultuous history of the plant, without transforming the novel into a stale Environmental Protection Agency report. The novelty in her approach is the seemingly effortless inclusion of former workers' and activists' experiences and stories; thus, the reader meets the design engineer Jim Stone, security guards Stan and Bill, lab workers Debbie and Jacque, activist Sisters Pat and Pam, rancher Marcus Church, Dr. Johnson and attorney Holme, FBI agent Jon Lipsky and many others.

With the help of almost two hundred accounts and interviews, and Iversen's further research, Rocky Flats is unmasked as 'the most dangerously contaminated site' in America, with unofficial reports claiming plutonium contamination of the soil and nitrate contamination of water supplies, radioactive rabbits and cattle, 2,600 pounds of plutonium unaccounted for, and a significantly higher rate of cancer of the lung, liver, bone and bone marrow and other life threatening illnesses for the nearby residents.

Full Body Burden also follows the development of *Cook v. Rockwell International*, an environmental class-action lawsuit seeking \$500 million in damages for property owners whose house values have plummeted because of the Rocky Flats scandal; plaintiffs seeking financial compensation for health issues related to low-level radiation exposure encounter difficulties in providing a direct causal link between the pollution and the illnesses.

At the core of the book lies the parallel between the family memoir and the nuclear plant investigation, bridged by the leitmotifs of secrecy and voluntary ignorance. Here stands a rather difficult question to answer. Is this parallel successful or not? Throughout most of the eight chapters of the

book, although these two universes intertwine chronologically, they don't seem to affect one another substantively. In other words, the parallel seems forced; the author herself admits that, for most of her childhood and life as a young adult, she was blissfully unaware of the dangers posed by Rocky Flats, even when she worked there as a temp. The juxtaposition of the two universes – both skilfully rendered and perfectly able to stand on their own – is constructed rather retrospectively, post the Rocky Flats era, as the author seems to savagely chase for meanings and connections. However, a series of intimate stories of friends and neighbours whose lives have been affected and, in some cases, terminated by diseases that can be traced back to radiation, find a place in the book and carry the difficult parallel through.

In terms of research, nobody can deny the exquisite result of a dozen years' work, and Iversen is particular about the transparency of her studies, at the back of the book recording, beyond Allen Ginsberg's 'Plutonian Ode' and Acknowledgements, thorough notes for individual chapters, a much needed timeline, and an Index.

After the Fukushima Nuclear Plant explosions, *Full Body Burden*, beyond being a captivating account of a 1960s American middle-class suburban family with all the tarnished hopes and gaffes of the Cold War era, becomes relevant to anybody who has ever doubted their government's pledge of working for the common good.

Lucia Sweet

Communists

Phil Piratin, *Our Flag Stays Red*, Lawrence & Wishart, 2006, 128 pages, paperback ISBN 9781905007288, 12.99

Although only glancing at it (p. 125 n. 42), the recently (2012) published biography of Bert Ramelson (born Baruch Rachmilevitch) by Roger Seifert and Tom Sibley provokes exhumation of this memoir of another once-famous communist of that time, Phil Piratin.

Originally published in 1948, this re-issue comes with an introductory well-annotated essay by John Callow taking Piratin's story down to his death in 1995, plus a smattering of cartoons and photographs, though regrettably without an index. It can be supplemented by the various newspaper obituaries (available online), most valuably that by Piratin's comrade, former *Daily Worker* editor, George Matthews (*Independent*, 18 December 1995).

To younger readers both Piratin and his beloved Communist Party of Great Britain are ancient history. A Jewish-born (1907) East Ender, Piratin grew up and remained in his native Stepney throughout the turbulent Thirties and the War years, the latter culminating in his 1945 election as Communist Member of Parliament for Mile End, winning 5,075 votes over Labour's 3,861 and Conservative's 1,722. At the 1950 Election, his constituency abolished, Piratin stood unsuccessfully in Stepney.

Along with the, by now, veteran Willie Gallacher, Piratin was the only other Communist in Westminster, summing up this dynamic duo's parliamentary tactics thus:

'I automatically moved and he seconded that he should be leader. He then appointed me as Chief Whip. Comrade Gallacher decides the policy and I make sure he carries it out.'

Major set-pieces in his memoir describe organising the East End's resistance to Mosley's fascists, culminating in the famous 'Battle of Cable Street' (4 October 1936) – all very different from the BBC's *EastEnders*; the struggle for tenants' rights and concomitant rent strikes; the celebrated invasion of the Savoy Hotel – a modern 'red top' headline would doubtless have read something like 'Savoy Grill-ed by Phil'; breaking into the underground, thereby forcing the government to abandon its criminal ban on using Tube stations as air-raid shelters.

Piratin recounts these exploits with verve, wit, and a seasoning of justifiable conceit. His anti-Mosley campaign was the inspiration, albeit more pessimistically reworked, for *Chicken Soup with Barley*, the first play in Arnold Wesker's celebrated trilogy. Wesker's own commitment to the working class was also manifest in his play *The Kitchen* and the founding (1964) of Centre 42 at the Roundhouse Theatre.

It is probably no coincidence that some of the momentous issues of the 1930s were reflected in ideologically unsympathetic literary quarters. P. G. Wodehouse's Roderick Spode memorably ridicules Mosley in *The Code of the Woosters*. Everard Webley in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counterpoint* looks (despite some critics' doubts) like his *Doppelgänger*. Graham Greene's now largely forgotten and never filmed novel *It's a Battlefield* has (from a cynical viewpoint) communists and communism at its centre, also industrial unrest among women workers at a match factory – Greene himself summed up his dominant theme as 'the injustice of man's justice'. The arch-Tory Anthony Powell was moved to include Marxists (Stalinist and Trotskyist), Pacifists, and fighting for the Republican cause in Spain in his epic *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

Most relevant, however, and most deserving to be revived and read alongside Piratin is Edward Upward's autobiographical trilogy of novels, *The Spiral Ascent*, comprising *In The Thirties*, *The Rotten Elements*, and *No Home But The Struggle*. They tell the story of a poet and his wife joining the Party, first to combat Mosley, then after the War the alleged 'Revisionism' of the new leadership's increasing leaning to a parliamentary rather than revolutionary road to Socialism.

Apart from a passing compliment to Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, Piratin has little to say about this issue (in contrast with Ramelson), preferring to concentrate on the day-to-day struggles on his home patch and viewing his time at Westminster as fruitful. One imagines his conviction (justified in retrospect) that Stalin's Socialism in One Country made more immediate sense than Trotsky's notion of Permanent Revolution. Were Piratin alive today, he would be asking some very practical questions about Leon's dreamier disciples. How can the workers be armed? Without the CPGB, who will lead them into Revolution? One of the competing Trotskyist/ite groupuscules? If the latter, would their first concern be 'proceeding to construct the Socialist order' or liquidating their sectarian rivals?

According to Seibert and Sibley (p. 35), 'We have no record of Ramelson's personal reaction to the Hitler-Stalin pact'. Piratin largely glosses over it, with no mention of the agonising debates it caused among the Party's top brass, minutely documented by Francis King and George Matthews in *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War: The Verbatim Record of the Central Committee Meetings of 25 September and 2-3 October 1939* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1990; cf. Peter Fryer's detailed review in the *Encyclopedia of Trotskyism On-Line*). For Piratin and company, the trouble was that their standard defence that Stalin was sensibly buying time had to ignore the simple fact that he needed this hiatus because his massive purges of the officer corps had left the Red Army unfit to fight.

Nowadays, beyond the *Morning Star* and memories of veteran members/ex-members, the CPGB is generally consigned to Trotsky's 'Dustbin of History'. Some year ago, Ken Coates (who broke with it over Tito) mentioned to me in a letter that he nevertheless thought the allegedly 'malign' role of the Party 'somewhat exaggerated'. Both those who hope he is right and those who hope he is wrong should go back to Piratin for his record (above reservations notwithstanding) of the Party at its best. *Our Flag Stays Red* deserves to stay read.

Barry Baldwin

The Religion of Art

Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination*, Faber and Faber, 656 pages, hardback ISBN 978-0571228614, £25, paperback ISBN 9780571228621, £17.99

This is the latest of Fiona MacCarthy's biographies, following upon William Morris, Byron and Eric Gill, and it is certainly the most deeply researched and heaviest – 656 pages, including sixty pages of references and a forty page Index. My hands and arms ached from holding it, but it was well worth the effort. I have called this review 'The Religion of Art' because Burne-Jones himself said that he gave up the Christian religion in which he was reared for what he called 'the Religion of Art'.

MacCarthy makes it quite clear that this was not just 'art for art's sake'. There was a serious purpose behind Burne-Jones's art. In a telling phrase, MacCarthy quotes him saying that 'he negates the possibility of human littleness'. He called on his pupils to 'look for beauty', and in MacCarthy's words, 'his philosophy of art' lies in 'his conviction that a life lived through beauty was every body's birthright, regardless of their income and social position'.

MacCarthy makes a special point of Burne-Jones's painting of *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, that was greeted with acclaim in 1884, that it 'encapsulated many bitter conflicts of the Victorian age and it established Burne-Jones on a new footing as the most important painter of his time'. 'It is the stark contrasts,' she writes, 'between capitalists and under-classes, between the factory owners and the workers' that informs his art.

It is a serious problem for any reader that while some of the portraits are reproduced in colour, larger pieces like *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* are much reduced and in the black and white of the photogravure. Fortunately, in late 2012, it is possible to go to the Tate Gallery, to see a major collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings and drawings, and I strongly recommend a visit.

There could be no book about Burne-Jones that was not also about William Morris, with whom – with just one breakdown over political differences towards the end of Morris's life – Burne-Jones collaborated in brotherly artistic and business endeavours. It was Burne-Jones, MacCarthy reminds us, who invented the term 'Arts and Crafts' for the exhibition that covered Morris & Co.'s designs for tapestries, embroideries, wallpapers, curtains, painted furniture, stained glass, that came from the pens and

brushes of Burne-Jones and Morris. It was, moreover, at the Working Men's College that Burne-Jones studied under Madox Brown.

The political rift between Burne-Jones and Morris, after 1883, when Morris joined Hyndman's Marxist Democratic Federation and, later, formed the even more revolutionary Socialist League, is a sad story told very sympathetically by MacCarthy. Burne-Jones had liked Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* and *Unto this Last* (which my father gave me to read when I was 16, and confirmed me as a life-long socialist), and Burne-Jones had opposed his nephew, Rudyard Kipling's, imperialist defence of the South African War. Ruskin could attack the capitalist system but, for Burne-Jones, Morris was an artist and a poet, and should stick to his last. The rift with Morris was healed before Morris died

MacCarthy reveals Burne-Jones showing awareness that he was mixing with an aristocratic and wealthy set, but his closest friends in the aristocracy, the painter George Howard 9th Earl of Carlisle and his wife Rosalind, had left-wing views. Burne-Jones's wife, Georgiana, was pro-Boer in the South African War, and continued to take Morris's *The Commonweal*, after Burne-Jones rejected it. She was a suffragette and, after Burne-Jones's death, became a socialist and member of the Labour Party and local councillor.

MacCarthy deals with Burne-Jones's relationship with Georgiana with extreme delicacy and empathy. The great love of Burne-Jones's life was, unquestionably, his model, the Greek Maria Zambaco, whom Georgiana somehow tolerated. But Burne-Jones had a succession of beautiful young girls for whom he developed an overpowering passion, leaving him distraught when they became engaged to be married. Several of them are shown in MacCarthy's book reproduced in colour, and reveal how, in Burne-Jones's words, the artist 'reaches into that inner soul, the psyche of the subject'. Burne-Jones's love for his own children is beyond doubt – Phil and Margaret – Margaret who married Mackail, founder of Morris & Co., and author of Morris's biography.

This book of Fiona MacCarthy's is so full of fascinating references to famous people that a few have to be mentioned in a review. First perhaps Gladstone, about whose death Burne-Jones is quoted as saying, 'So that great creature is gone'. Burne-Jones designed a memorial glass window for the Gladstone family at Hawarden. Then, at the other end of the Party spectrum, stood Stanley Baldwin, son of Burne-Jones's cousin, Alfred, who shared with his father and Burne-Jones's son, Philip, the watches over the coffin, before the cremation at Burne-Jones's death. Another close relative of Burne-Jones was Rudyard Kipling, his favourite nephew, for

whom Burne-Jones is shown as having mixed feelings. MacCarthy quotes him at first responding enthusiastically to Kipling's famous *Recessional*, but then having second thoughts about the battle cry of jingo-politics. Henry James is quoted by MacCarthy as meeting with Burne-Jones 'a couple of times at the thrilling, throbbing Parnell trial'. For Burne-Jones, MacCarthy writes, 'the arraignment of Parnell was an agonising demonstration of English hypocrisy', and she adds, 'bringing about his final disenchantment with political and public life'.

There are interesting references to the Left political interest in Burne-Jones – an exhibition of the *Briar Rose* paintings at Toynbee Hall. These paintings were purchased by Alexander Henderson, later Lord Faringdon, who married the widow of the editor of *The Daily Worker*. But, as an Africanist, I like best the fact that in the tapestry of *The Star of Bethlehem* at Merton Abbey, one of the Magi, as the King of Nubia, is black.

To end this review, Fiona MacCarthy has given me the perfect envoi in the words she quotes from the gardener at Kipling's house, where the grave rests:

'What did strike me about him,' Marten said, 'was his humanity. There aint too many humane men in the world today.'

You can say that again!

Michael Barratt Brown

Human Touch

Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *Poetry of the Taliban*, Hurst & Company 2012, 224 pages, hardback ISBN 9781849041119, £14.99

Islamist militants, suicide bombers, *hadjis* or terrorists, the Taliban have been given multiple names and identities, mainly by the Western media. Since 9/11 they have lived on the battlefield and they have fought on the *wrong* side; they instantly became the enemies, of freedom, of religious tolerance, of the 21st century.

Through the vastly publicised *Poetry of the Taliban*, Van Linschoten and Kuehn, Kandahar-based veterans of Afghan recent history, are seeking to expose a Taliban world beyond what is common knowledge, offer a human touch to a much derided populace, append poems and Pashto literature to guns and a survivalist culture. An audacious attempt by editors and

publishers alike, the book was dubbed ‘enemy propaganda’ by a former commander of British forces in Afghanistan, and has attracted controversy, anonymous threats, as well as literary praise. With that said, *Poetry of the Taliban* has an in-built pick-up-and-see-for-yourself factor!

Presenting 235 carefully selected poems, also approved by and uploaded on the Taliban website, the anthology includes love poems, pastoral verses and patriotic ballads, and illustrates universally familiar leitmotifs such as heartbreak, sacrifice, doubt, courage and hatred.

One of the attributes of this project is the exploration of a much overlooked literature. With Afghanistan historically being at the centre of many trade and migration routes, it benefited from a rich blend of cultures and still exhibits diverse people and ethnicities: the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baloch and others. From a literary standpoint, it is appealing to take a closer look at the traditional *Tarana* oral ballads, translated from Pashto and depicting fighting and dying, such as these verses from *Pamir*, by Faizani:

I know the black, black mountains;

I know the desert and its problems.

My home is the mountain, my village is the mountain and I live in the mountains;

I know the black ditches.

...

I am the eagle of Spin Ghar's high peaks;

I know Pamir's canyons.

I walk through it day and night;

I know the bends of Tor Ghar.

Another characteristic form of verse is the beautiful *ghazal*, with rhyming couplets and a refrain, arguably Shakespearian in musicality and rhythm, although often without continuity of narrative, which is its most original and commendable feature. The *ghazal* has a rich history, having originated in sixth century Arabia and flourishing with the writings of the thirteenth and fourteenth century Persian poets, Rumi and Hafiz. It became a mark of Urdu and Pashto literature in the seventeenth century, Rahman Baba being a prominent poet of the movement that deals with melancholy, love, longing, and metaphysical questions. The German poet and philosopher Goethe experimented with the form, as did the Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca.

A good example of a *ghazal* in its original form is Khairkhwa's poem

titled ‘Injured’, in the anthology’s Human Cost section:

*I stoned him with the stones of light tears
 Then I hung my sorrow on the gallows like Mansour.
 Like those who have been killed by the infidels,
 I counted my heart as one of the martyrs.
 It might have been the wine of our memory
 That made my heart drunk five times.
 The more I kept the secret of my love,
 This simple ghazal spoke more of my secrets.
 The one who gave you his trust,
 That person neglected you.
 I was injured, my brother was martyred,
 My stepmother watched me.
 O poem of Khairkhwa! I will accept your perfection
 If you guide back one of those who have fallen astray.*

Notice the seemingly autonomous couplets, with references to nationalistic spirit and heroes of the fatherland, romantic love, hardships of friendship, despair and loss. Commonly, the *ghazal* also includes the name of the poet in the last couplet, a technique called *takhallus*. The mentioning of ‘wine’ and ‘drunk’ is done symbolically, without appealing to the profane meanings of the words; this is particular to Afghan aesthetics and, although the imagery used is ordinary (with words such as ‘gallows’, ‘nightingale’, ‘flower’ often present), the interpretation brings forth a different dimension for every read – or recitation – of the same poem.

Although the editors have divided the entries into six different categories, one could argue that there is one theme visible all throughout: the war. References to the invaders, the ‘infidels’, the ‘cruel oppressors’ suggest that the war has forever altered and contaminated every sliver of Afghan life:

*You come out of the nice city of lights.
 You are seeking your life in our black walls.
 **

*O son of our tribes! Don’t sell yourselves to the Americans.
 **

*The army of the crazed crusaders will withdraw
 If our zealous ghazis fight.
 **

*The house of my history and culture was looted today,
Each slave is now riding me;
The teeth of the East and West have become like pliers on my muscles.*

...

Who made a night raid on my house again?

The unforeseen and welcome theme is that of love, be it for a woman or a comrade of arms. It is the section that most closely accomplishes the editors' semi-secret wish, which is to portray the Taliban in a new, softer light.

*Separation from you dried my eyes,
You were not blessed in the holy bosom.
In this sad journey of looking for you,
I haven't remembered you in every place.*

*

*Your love aside, what else is there?
It is like approaching the desert.
Like the dust on your footsteps.*

Politically, this anthology is bound to be divisive. Literarily, it stands miles apart from contemporary perception of aesthetics, but it is an endless and fairly uncharted source of middle-eastern folklore, which is enough of a selling point for any literary critic and/or connoisseur who hasn't yet dabbled in the legends of Mansour and Malalai. Finally, the book's covert mission was to explore a different side of one of the twenty-first century's most puzzling characters; propagandistic or not, the anthology does indeed infuse personality and moral fibre into what were formally mere sketches of the Afghan Taliban.

Lucia Sweet

Moves

Guy Arnold, *Migration: Changing the World*, Pluto Press, London, 2011, 282 pages, hardback ISBN 9780745329062, £60, paperback ISBN 9780745329055, £ 19.99

Migration, of course, is a part of life and so, naturally, has been with us since the beginning of time: plants, birds, animals all do it and always have done so, human beings, too. The author concentrates on the last 60 years of the phenomenon.

The mass of statistics about the movement of millions of people can become a bit overwhelming, but you can hardly expect anything else in a book on migration. You can plough through it (it's worth it), do some judicious skipping, and read about the countries that interest you most, or do it the easy way and just read the *Introduction* and *Tentative Conclusions*. They, together, make a first class essay, but you would miss wee gems like the one statistic that fascinated me:

'In the early years of the Napoleonic wars, up to a third of the sailors on Nelson's fleet were blacks Shanghaied from the (Caribbean) islands.'

In his introduction, Guy Arnold makes a lot of projections about the masses of people on the planet by 2050 and quotes UN forecasts. He quotes Prof. Aubrey Manning of Edinburgh University who is horrified at the idea of so many more people on the planet and, come to that, so many more people in Britain. Neither the Earth nor the country can sustain such hordes. The author snaps back, 'The debate was less concerned with sustainability than with arguing against further immigration'. In his mouth, this is something of a sneer: he does *not* like people who are anti-immigration, and with good reason; racism is never far away. The way the UK treats its immigrants makes up some of the darkest pages in *Migration*. However, the author quotes James Lovelock, 'The Environmentalist' (of Gaia fame) who comes to the rescue and seems to contradict the UN's look into the future, when 'pestilence, war and famine will have dealt with the majority of humans'.

Arnold is very good on economic migrants. He insists that they have not come to scrounge off the welfare state. On the contrary, they have come to *work*. They are usually young, usually men, except those from the Philippines (your Filipino maid?), and are full of energy and initiative. The layabouts stay at home and lay about. The migrants run appalling risks on their journeys, drowning in their thousands in overcrowded, leaky boats or dying of thirst in their hundreds as they cross deserts. They are exploited and sometimes killed by ruthless people-trafficking gangs. In 2011, 80 were mowed down in one go. Others are thrown overboard.

'By mid 2007 there was a consensus that at least 6,000 Africans had perished attempting to cross the Mediterranean (the figure was based upon the number of bodies found, but many more would also have drowned without trace). The ruthlessness of traffickers is balanced by the desperation of the migrants, who entrust such people with their lives.'

Obviously, they are not in it for an easy ride. When and if they reach their

destination, they are often treated abominably and work under appalling conditions:

‘All they want is a chance to work. They don’t mind putting in 12 hours a day or working on Saturdays and Sundays. They don’t mind being paid a pittance, doing menial jobs and never getting a holiday. They will put up with bad working conditions that you or I would never tolerate. People fear they bring disease, but it’s only the young and the very strong that can make this journey. All they want is to stay. Why are we so against them?’

Parts of the press hysterically denounce foreigners, sponging off the state and taking jobs away from the locals, in spite of the fact that migrants often do jobs that no one else wants. If there is no work for them, they tend to go back home or move on to another country where there is.

Big business rather likes them when there is no recession, because they *need* them, can pay them less, and don’t have to worry so much about ‘workers’ rights’. The fascists hate them because they contaminate ‘purity’, spoil the ‘British way of life’, the ‘American way of life’, or the ‘French way of life’, whatever that means.

If a migrant survives all this, he or she can make what is considered good money. They send lots of it back home. For many countries, remittances are their biggest income, more than from traditional exports. They like their citizens to emigrate: they bring in good money and relieve unemployment and social unrest. The downside is that not only the poor, semi- and unskilled leave, but also the brightest and best, the brain drain. Scarce resources are spent on training them, only to be recruited by rich countries which take who they want and discard who they don’t like.

The author also discusses internal migration: from the countryside to the city. For the first time in history, more people live an urban life rather than a rural one, which causes huge social upheaval; witness the rise of shantytowns, *favelas*, *villa miserias*, and *barrios marginados* around the world. The Chinese internal migration (as opposed to the very large diaspora) over recent years, including millions, is the greatest in history.

In his final section, *Tentative Conclusions*, Arnold writes:

‘Over the years 1990-2010 a huge movement of people occurred worldwide. Some were refugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced people fleeing wars or other disasters, but the majority were economic migrants seeking a better life in countries other than their own.’

It can be hard to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants. Sometimes, it seems that more Salvadorans live in the United States than

in El Salvador. No doubt, an exaggeration, but thousands left the country looking for a better life and thousands more fled a long and very nasty civil war. This is where I have reservations about the author's views. Sometimes migrants do predominate:

‘Prior to the credit crunch, Dubai and the rest of the United Arab Emirates were estimated to have a population of 6.4 million of whom 5.5 million were foreigners.’

Although needed in such places for the élite's grandiose ideas of development, they are often treated disgracefully. At times, the host country might justifiably feel overwhelmed. Two million Iraqis fled their country after the American led invasion in 2003, with 9,000 people seeking asylum in the UK, 800 in the US, 18,000 in Sweden, and 6,000 in Australia. Jordan received 750,000 refugees, mostly unskilled, and Syria about a million. Up to October 2007, Syria maintained an open-door policy towards Iraqi refugees, but then began to feel the strain and see the impact on the locals, more concerned with the decreasing resources than with racial prejudice.

Take another example: under Mugabe, a quarter of Zimbabweans have left the country, with a large percentage ending up in nearby South Africa, adding to the country's high unemployment and, thus, not welcomed. It is probably true that all racists are anti-immigration, but it does not necessarily follow that all opposition to immigration is racist.

Arnold approves of Spain and Italy's humane decision that, ‘when faced with large numbers of illegal immigrants, they solved the logistics of dealing with them by offering an amnesty’, which meant that the migrants were free to travel north in search of work.

In the chaos that immigration sometimes is, several solutions emerge. One is to make the poor countries less poor, encouraging people to stay. Spain's former Prime Minister, Zapatero, said that the matter is of concern for all Europeans:

‘We must work rapidly to reduce the gap in prosperity between Spain and Morocco and countries to the south of Morocco. The prosperity gap between Spain and Morocco is the largest in the world between bordering countries.’

The truth is that development, as usual, has been, more often than not, more to the advantage of the developers than those about to be developed, with the former exploiting, robbing, raping and despoiling the Third World for centuries. Now we are reaping the whirlwind harvest that was sown.

A second approach would be to build a wall like the Great Wall of China,

Hadrian's Wall, and Offa's Dyke, and the infamous Berlin Wall. These days there are also electrified wire fences; the Israelis, Americans, Indians and Saudis are building one each. Arnold says that, in the end, a wall or fence will make no difference; migrants will find a way (admittedly, more difficult and dangerous), whether it is through, over, under or round it.

One quibble, and I think it is a quibble, is that the word 'love' occurs only once in the whole book. Fair enough, it is about economic migrants and those fleeing death and destruction; yet separation of families, husbands and wives, parents and children, over long distances and long periods of time, has a devastating impact on heart and soul. Perhaps that is the subject of another book. As for this one, as I say, I flagged at times, but I kept at it. It was worth it. I learned a lot.

Nigel Potter

Down the Pit

Tom Hickman, *Called Up, Sent Down – The Bevin Boys' War*, History Press, 2010, 252 pages, paperback ISBN 9780752457499, £9.99

To keep the war machine running, Britain, during the Second World War, needed more and more coal. There wasn't enough so more miners were needed. Many miners had joined up, and they were not easily enticed to go back down the pit. The army was a cushier number! In desperation, Ernest Bevin decided to call up boys to work down the mines rather than join the forces. Most of these young men were disgusted. They wanted to fight for King and country, not work down the bloody pit. Of course, they had no choice, and this is their story.

It's not exactly D-Day or the Battle of the Bulge. I would not have bothered with it except my second father-in-law was, apparently, a 'Bevin Boy'. I was vaguely interested. (My first father-in-law taught maths to young pilots-to-be, who usually didn't return.) I bought a remaindered copy, and before sending it on to my stepdaughter I read it first, more out of a sense of duty. It turned out to be fascinating.

Bevin was serious about this conscription. He built hostels for the young called-up miners. It was not enough. Many had to live in digs, which varied from good to total squalor. The regular miners were kind enough to them once they had proved their worth. The regular miners themselves didn't care much about the war and were not especially patriotic. They would go on strike, war or no war, if they felt they were getting a raw deal.

Their main interests included beer and football, and when you have read this book you can see why. When you have worked a shift you are not much good for anything else: the sheer bloody hard physical labour. I felt exhausted just reading about it. Conditions were terrible, a bit like the trenches underground, admittedly without the shelling, but dangerous enough (‘When you have to “go”, lad, do it on tha shovel.’)

If I had any choice (but, of course, one never does) I think I would take my chances storming up the beaches of Normandy rather than work down a mine. These ‘Bevin Boys’ and their miner mentors are some of the unsung heroes of World War Two.

Nigel Potter

Public Service

Jenny Manson (editor), *Public Services on the Brink*, Imprint Academic, 250 pages, paperback ISBN 9781845403065, £17.95

My interest in this collection is due to the fact that it’s about how I derive my living; working in the public sector. Generally speaking, I have some concerns with compilations because they often include opinions (or, in the case of music, sounds) that offer no access point. This is the first compilation where I have not experienced such difficulties. With some books, the reader is confounded by obfuscation to the point that he or she puts the volume down. So it was with some satisfaction that, on reading this collection, I found that it was free of acronyms and unfathomable technical commentary. In fact, the contributions are written in a direct and clear manner. Personal experiences run through them in a way that helps the reader’s engagement with what are generally very tough subjects. Often, when you talk to people, they will have a clear reason for using the particular public service they require; for example, ‘Anna’ in the piece on Legal Aid. But, I wonder, would she have a cogent appraisal of the overall requirement for public services?

Do I? I know that I want public services for myself at those times when a simple piece of practical, professional insight can save hours of wasted and misdirected effort. But I also want such services to assist those in the society around me in the moments when they experience desperate need and distress. Sadly, ‘Anna’s’ difficult case is a regular and almost common experience for too many of our citizens. Other such experiences of public service go even deeper and may be even more complicated and upsetting.

Each experience needs careful consideration, a degree of empathy beyond the usual boundaries, and insights that can usually only be gained from access at a professional level.

Nor is it solely a question of the legalities surrounding personal distress. For example, in the section on the NHS there is an exposé of the ‘Paperless Mountain’, which brought a smile to my lips. The opening line of this section reads: ‘a key aspect of good care is record keeping’, which is not rocket science, but the author then spells out another difficult truth that confronts those of us working in the public services. This is about ‘... the triumph of form over substance and an assumption that people doing the job cannot be relied upon’.

At this point, I knew that this was why public services were indeed perceived as being ‘on the brink’, with the media shoving them over the edge. There are ‘managers’ and ‘bureaucrats’ currently in public service, depicted honestly here, who have been converted to the cause of ‘self interest’. They may well have been committed to public service in the remote recesses of their memories, but they are now being bought off all too easily and rapidly.

The underlying theme of each of these pieces is that we are suddenly being told at every turn, and at every opportunity, that public service should pay for itself. It should be managed just like any household budget. This theme began with a comment made by Margaret Thatcher, and it has grown into the latest fashionable tool to promote a neoliberal agenda. The proposal is that every action and every process in the public service should show a profit, be disposed of, or changed into a profitable adaptation of such a service.

Were such assertions true, there would be no need for the word ‘service’ at all; it could easily be replaced by the word ‘business’. But true public service cannot be replaced by business, despite governments telling the public sector that private industry will successfully take over its functions. This has proved a disaster at every turn. The private sector, one contribution asserts, is very good at micro management, but it is incapable of the macro management required by government. The security débâcles at the London Olympics and the Royal Jubilee have exposed that myth. The private sector is good at exploitative conduct and extracting the maximum money for itself regardless of performance. It seduces managers with the size of the potential salaries and bonuses they can achieve despite, or regardless of, performance. Such individuals are the means by which some politicians seek to return society to a time when their forebears were in absolute control.

The final chapter of *Public Services on the Brink* gives some insight into

such a scheme. I have myself witnessed the witch-hunts of trade unionists whose opinions do not conform to those advocating a neoliberal cash grab. The fundamental and cogent arguments advanced by such trade unionists cannot easily be refuted, even by long serving hacks in the media. This chapter quite rightly asserts that the tactic is, if you cannot beat the argument, then smear and vilify the person, whether they are trade union leaders with substantial profiles, or middle-ranking activists subject to blacklisting because they have raised health and safety concerns. In some instances, trade unionists have had their entire working lives blighted because they have shown concern for their colleagues.

This is a very good book, well written and tightly edited. But, more importantly, it provides many of the essential insights and arguments that clearly explain why public service is essential to all of us. You cannot easily dispose of the profiteering pariahs, as seen in the section on the railways, but many have successfully mitigated and countered the disjointed and false neoliberal arguments for profit from public services. If you did not have a coherent picture of public service provision before reading *Public Services on the Brink*, it should assist considerably in providing arguments to support institutions that are an essential ingredient in our society, and are pivotal to us becoming the people we aspire to be.

Dave Putson

Alliances No More

Panagiotis Dimitrakis, *Failed Alliances of the Cold War: Britain's Strategy and Ambitions in Asia and the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris, 2012, 256 pages, hardback ISBN 9781848859746, £52.50

In a carefully resourced work, Panagiotis Dimitrakis examines the history of the creation, existence and demise of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Drawing upon primary research of the latest declassified British and American intelligence assessments, diplomatic dispatches and military plans, he has written a compelling and important new work of Cold War history¹.

Dimitrakis divides his book into seven chapters: 'Britain and the United States: Shaping alliances beyond NATO'; 'Pakistan's strategy'; 'CENTO's Nuclear Bombers and Cyprus'; 'SEATO: Planning and Divisions'; 'SEATO and Vietnam'; 'The Shah and CENTO'; and 'Demise of the

Alliances'. Together with the brief Introduction and the Conclusion the main text is 186 pages, followed by 34 pages of notes – mostly to recently declassified material – and eight pages of bibliography.

As the author states in his introduction:

‘The central argument of this book, assessing British and, to a lesser extent, American strategy and ambitions for CENTO and SEATO, is that the absence of a Russian and/or Chinese threat of invasion led to the demise of these alliances, since key regional members – notably Iran and Pakistan – lost their interest in continuing with the organizations. No actual deterrence was ever implemented, because there was no real threat to be deterred in the first place. Besides, all the allies showed themselves willing to make only qualified commitments to the defence plans. The Indo-Pakistani wars, the Vietnam war, the détente with Soviet Russia and finally the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979 cost SEATO and CENTO their very existence.’

In the first chapter, Dimitrakis examines the attitude prevalent in the US towards the creation of anti-communist alliances in Asia and the Middle East during and after the Korean war in order to contain the USSR, and compares it with the UK motives towards alliance-building:

‘On the British side, the key motivations for building alliances had been two: first, Britain needed to preserve her world-power status in Europe, Asia and the Middle East ... The second motivation was that Britain needed a great deal of help in this endeavour ...’

On the same page, however, it is pointed out that there was a third incentive, reminiscent of situations vividly depicted in *Dr. Stangelove*:

‘Indeed the Foreign Office feared that unless Washington was not bound by some sort of formal alliance in Asia and the Middle East, they would “drag, by unilateral action, the western world into a full scale war with China – or worse”.’²²

In addition to comparisons of the US versus UK motivations towards alliance building, and comparisons (and differentiations) between the NATO and CENTO/SEATO treaties, the first chapter also includes reference to other alliances in the Pacific area; the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS), the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, the non-military Colombo Plan for economic and social development, and so on. Incidentally, in the case of the latter there arises an interesting example of the value and continuing endurance of a *non-military* pact:

‘Britain’s stance towards the SEATO was ambivalent – in the light of strong pressure from the Treasury not to expand overseas commitments. Already the “Colombo Plan” had shown that a non-military pact of mutual economic and

technical aid could be successful with non-aligned nations. It was signed in January 1950 by Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon, Pakistan and India, with Laos acceding in 1951. A year later Burma, Thailand, Nepal, and the Philippines joined, followed by Indonesia in 1953. Other states acceding were Japan (1954), Bhutan and South Korea (1962), Maldives and Afghanistan (1963), Iran and Singapore (1966), Bangladesh and Fiji (1972), New Guinea (1973), and Vietnam and Mongolia (2004). The United States had signed in February 1951, on the understanding that the Colombo Plan was no more than “informal and advisory”²³. The Plan drew upon British resources and increased spending on aid packages; but most significantly the pact demonstrated that it could survive Cold War antagonisms as well as regional members’ suspicions of each other.’

This example of non-military co-operation exhibiting such resilience over time contrasts perfectly with the content of the second chapter, dealing with the main Pakistani motive for participation in CENTO and SEATO, i.e. their envisioned value in Indo-Pakistani antagonism. Dimitrakis examines in detail the Pakistani aspirations as a *paradigm* of the complications and disappointments (for all parties involved) likely to arise from persistent effort of an alliance member to exploit its membership to gain military strength (and free armaments) against an antagonist *not included* – neither in letter nor in spirit – in the list of threats of the alliance.

Another such paradigm, on a grander scale, is examined in detail in chapters four and five, which are probably the most interesting parts of the book for the general reader. Those chapters examine the original rationale for the creation of SEATO (chapter four) and then the frustrated American aspirations regarding the use of SEATO’s forces against North Vietnam, a country not designated as ‘a threat’ by the Manila Treaty. Chapter five also examines the Labour Government’s (under Harold Wilson) refusal to acquiesce to any endeavour which could potentially lead to UK entanglement in the Vietnam war.

In the third chapter Dimitrakis devotes 14 pages to the strategic British ‘sovereign’ bases in Cyprus which hosted an RAF nuclear ‘deterrent’ force as a permanent supporting element of CENTO’s military plans. It is worth noting that this force (composed of two British Canberra nuclear bomber squadrons and, later, a Vulcan squadron) was the sole element of UK (or US) combat forces committed exclusively to CENTO. This force, plus valuable intelligence-gathering installations, was based in Cyprus at the time of the country’s struggle for national independence and later, during the sixties, of strife between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities. This chapter is thus of value for historians endeavouring to access the various complicated politico-military parameters exerting heavy

influence on the island's recent tortured history.

The sixth chapter focuses on the late Shah, while bringing to light a trove of diplomatic and intelligence assessments about the situation in Iran, the possibility of a threat via Afghanistan, and so on. It gives a vivid portrait of an autocrat whose grandiose and, at the same time, idiosyncratic and insecure character contributed to the unravelling of CENTO; the alliance was recognized as a relic by all participants already in the mid-seventies, the era of *détente*. But its death knell was sounded when Iran withdrew from the alliance soon after the Islamic revolution. It is a useful chapter, in lieu of the current international focus on Iran.

On the whole, *Failed Alliances* could be a very attractive and illuminating book for the historically inclined general reader, thanks to the good organization of the material and the author's astute observations. On the other hand, the very careful and extensive documentation, based on recently declassified material, makes *Failed Alliances* a 'must read' for the specialists – particularly historians and active diplomats – and a useful source for international relations students.

Theodore N. Iliadis

Notes

- 1 The two alliances were created in the fifties in order to deter the perceived Soviet threat in the Middle East (CENTO), and Soviet and/or Chinese one in the Far East (SEATO). The USA, UK, France, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan created CENTO in 1954 (The Manila Treaty). SEATO was created in 1959 by Britain, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, with the support, but not full membership, of the US.
- 2 Memorandum, FO, 19 September 1952, FO 371/101263 TNA
- 3 Lowe, *Contending with Nationalism and Communism*, p. 75.