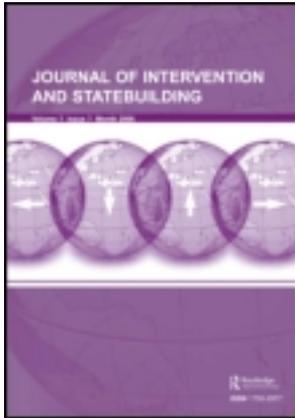


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BOOK REVIEWS

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BOOK REVIEWS

The 'Forgotten People'

Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant, edited by Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi. London: Routledge, 2011. Pp. 204 + bibliography + index. £80 (hbk). ISBN 978-0-415-58046-5.

Palestinian Refugees: Challenges of Repatriation and Development, edited by Rex Brynen and Roula El-Rifai. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007. Pp. 228 + notes + index. £59.50 (hbk). ISBN 978-1-84511-311-7.

Palestinians in Lebanon: Refugees Living with Long-term Displacement by Rebecca Roberts. London: IB Tauris. Pp. 196 + appendix + notes + bibliography + index. £56 (hbk). ISBN 978-1-84511-971-3.

On 15 May 2011—known to Palestinians as Nakba Day, the annual commemoration of their displacement during the creation of the State of Israel in 1948—extraordinary scenes were witnessed at Israel's borders.¹ Thousands of (mostly young) Palestinian refugees marched to it, some even tried to climb over border fences—they were 'going home' armed with deeds to properties in Israel and photographs of their grandparents' houses more than six decades after they had been displaced. Encouraged by the 'Arab Spring', these demonstrations showed that Palestinian refugees wanted their voices to be heard—at a time when the world had chosen to forget about them or regard them as potential 'spoilers' in a peace deal between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

Palestinian refugees have the unenviable position of constituting the oldest and largest single refugee group in the world. As of 1 January 2011, nearly 5 million were registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)—the UN agency established specifically to provide assistance to those displaced in 1948. While statistics on the refugees are not always reliable, according to the PLO Department of Refugee Affairs, almost 83 per cent live in historic Palestine and the countries that border it, 10 per cent live in the Arab region, and only 7 per cent in the rest of the world (Abu-Libdeh in Brynen and El-Rifai, p. 16).

Palestinian refugees are unique in that they are the only refugee population excluded from assistance from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and are subject to different laws, levels of assistance and protection than other refugee populations (Parvathaneni 2009). Like other UN institutions related to Palestine, UNRWA is covered by a specific and unique mandate. Whereas UNHCR's mandate empowers it to provide international protection to refugees who fall within the scope of its Statute and to seek permanent solutions, UNRWA's mandate is more limited—it only covers humanitarian assistance and is directly linked to the implementation of UN GA Resolution 194 that enshrines the Palestinian refugees' right of return to their homes and properties within the borders of what is now Israel. This 'protection gap' means that Palestinian refugees are in a weak position to assert their rights and seek protection (Roberts, p. 28). Furthermore, while refugee groups under the UNHCR mandate are offered three durable solutions—voluntary repatriation, integration into the host country, or resettlement in a third country—this is ruled out for the Palestinians because the first option has been consistently rejected by the State of Israel, while the second two options are rejected by the refugees and the host countries (Roberts, pp. 26–27). This has left Palestinian refugees in a condition of 'statelessness'—a situation that has led to their exclusion and marginalisation, and has helped to keep them in a state of limbo for four generations (Shiblak, in Knudsen and Hanafi, p. 122).

The three books under review here take different approaches but complement each other. Knudsen and Hanafi's edited collection (*Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*) takes a regional and largely sociological approach to the Palestinian refugee issue and examines the diversity of their experiences across the Levant through the critical interrogation of space, governance and locality. To this end, the chapters, many of which employ ethnographic methods, burrow deep to uncover the refugees' various living conditions and modes of governance—the latter covering within the camps themselves, relations with UNRWA and relations with host governments. The depth of the analyses are impressive and leave the reader with a heightened sense of the multiple layers of discrimination and conflict that Palestinian refugees have experienced, and the various dynamics of identity, memory and agency.

Roberts' book (*Palestinians in Lebanon: Refugees Living with Long-term Displacement*) focuses on the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and offers a detailed account of their lives and coping strategies in the camps. Roberts takes a broadly humanitarian and developmental approach to the subject, rather than a political one—although she does not sidestep or ignore the deep politicisation of the issue. Roberts draws on baseline data from all 12 camps in Lebanon as well as detailed qualitative research drawn from fieldwork in the three camps of Bourj al-Barajneh, Bourj al-Shamali and Nahr el-Barad to offer a rich picture of the problems and obstacles the refugees from these camps face in the hostile environment of Lebanon. However, she is far from portraying them as helpless; indeed she charts the various ways in which they cope by adapting the 'capacity and vulnerabilities framework' for her analysis.

Brynen and El-Rifai's edited collection (*Palestinian Refugees: Challenges of Repatriation and Development*), published in 2007, was based on two conferences held in Ottawa, largely reflecting Canada's role as Chair of the Refugee Working Group (one of the groups formed for the multilateral negotiations as part of the Middle East peace process). The Geneva Accord, the Taba Negotiations and the Clinton Parameters outlined five potential residential options: the future Palestinian state, former Israeli territories swapped to Palestine, Israel itself, third countries and present host countries. Given that return to Israel would be at its 'sovereign discretion', the book thus takes as its starting point that the Palestinian state would be 'the major destination of Palestinians wishing to return to their homeland' (p. 6). It therefore focuses on the developmental and technical challenges of absorbing and integrating refugees into a future Palestinian state within the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

It is a well-acknowledged fact that building peace in the Middle East will require a just and durable solution for Palestinian refugees, the descendants of whom remain largely displaced in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. One-quarter of the Palestinians that remained in Israel after 1948 were designated 'present absentees'—a curious and paradoxical concept that defined people as refugees in their own country and allowed the State of Israel to confiscate their homes, land and businesses (Hussein and McKay 2003). But the Declaration of Principles (better known as the Oslo Accords) signed between the PLO and the State of Israel in 1993 relegated the refugee issue to final status negotiations. Disagreements have thus continued over what constitutes a just and durable solution. Israel refuses to acknowledge culpability, viewing the refugees as the responsibility of the Arab states in which they reside, and categorically rejecting the right of return. Furthermore, Israel has tended to discourage the idea of the return of the refugees to areas that would be under Palestinian control (Masalha 2003, pp. 218–250). While the PLO's official position still supports the right of return, since the signing of the Oslo Accords and as revealed in the Palestine Papers, huge concessions were offered by PLO negotiators and the rights of refugees were characterised as a 'bargaining chip' (Swisher 2011). There is therefore deep angst amongst Palestinian refugees that the world, in general, and the Palestinian leadership, specifically, has abandoned them. Institutionally, the PLO still has an important meaning for the refugees as it is the *only* body still representing them, which is why negotiations for an upgraded UN membership which might mean abandoning the PLO in favour of the Palestinian Authority (although legal opinions differ on this) is proving so controversial. Indeed, 50 per cent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (i.e. the Occupied Palestinian Territories—OPT) believe that once a Palestinian state is established, a solution to the issue of the refugees will be postponed indefinitely (Hanafi, in Brynen and El-Rifai, p. 50).

So where does this situation leave the Palestinian refugees? At the moment, it means a continuation of the situation that has left them stateless, fragmented across the region and subject to different and varying levels of integration, rights and acceptance in host countries. Al Hussein and Bocco's chapter (in Knudsen

and Hanafi, pp. 128–146) explores the evolution of the refugees' status in the five areas of UNRWA operations—Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Syria—and argue that 'the modalities of the refugees' integration into the Arab host countries have been predominantly dictated by internal considerations' (p. 130). Their experiences have thus not been equal. Despite a number of Arab League directives to its member states to give Palestinian refugees economic and social rights equal to their citizens and issue them with special travel documents but without granting them nationality, the gap between theory and practice, and between the actions of different member states, is large (al-Az'ar 2009).

Refugees in Jordan and Syria have fared much better than those in Lebanon. In 1954, Jordan granted citizenship to all Palestinians displaced into its territory during the 1948 war. They were therefore given equal rights to Jordanian citizens, but allowed to retain their Palestinian refugee status and so UNRWA was allowed to operate (around 2 million are currently registered with UNRWA in Jordan). This was largely because Jordan had designs on the West Bank which it annexed in 1950 (al-Az'ar 2009, pp. 227–228). In Syria, Palestinian refugees (there are 467,000 currently registered with UNRWA) were granted social and economic rights equal to its citizens, and they were thereafter largely well integrated into the wider fabric of Syrian society. This is because the Syrian state's official ideology remains an Arab socialist one and its people are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. But in Lebanon, refugees (there are 425,000 currently registered with UNRWA) are subject to an extremely discriminatory regime, which is the result of Lebanon's shaky sectarian political make-up and consociational system of government that gives power to each of the three main groups (Sunni, Shi'a and Christian) based on the size of each community. As Roberts points out, Palestinians are predominantly Sunni Muslim and so giving them citizenship would have upset Lebanon's delicate sectarian balance (p. 186). However, given that almost all Palestinian Christians received citizenship, one can see that this logic has been selectively applied.

Hanssen-Bauer and Jacobsen's examination of the conditions of refugees in the host countries as revealed through living condition surveys, confirm that refugees in Syria are better off than in other host countries despite Syria being the poorest (in Brynen and El-Rifai, pp. 29–45). They find that conditions for the refugees do not differ from host country populations, although those in camps are poorer, particularly in Lebanon (*ibid.*). Because of the harsh situation and the greater level of dependency on the services of UNRWA, Lebanon has the highest number of camp dwellers at 50 per cent, but this drops to 27 per cent in Syria and even further in Jordan to 16 per cent (Kortam, in Knudsen and Hanafi, p. 19). The inhospitable environment in Lebanon includes a ban on owning property and severe restrictions on what types of jobs Palestinians are legally allowed to undertake, which has translated into high unemployment (particularly amongst the youth) and people working illegally (Roberts, pp. 94–105). Roberts' book paints a dire picture of the socio-economic situation for Palestinian camp dwellers in Lebanon, although her research also shows variation between the camps in Lebanon depending on the surrounding political environment and the

political leadership in the camps. At the time of her research (2000–1), for instance, relations between the camps near Tripoli and the host community were better than elsewhere in Lebanon, largely because the political forces both inside and outside the camps were pro-Syrian, although this has since changed (Roberts, p. 118). Two events, in particular, have changed Lebanese politics since Roberts' fieldwork—the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005 (which is still under investigation by a special tribunal), and the 2007 crisis in Nahr el-Barad refugee camp.

The 2007 crisis of Nahr el-Barad—where fighting between the Lebanese Army and a militia group called Fatah al-Islam resulted in bombardment that reduced the refugee camp to rubble—understandably features in a few of the contributions to Knudsen and Hanafi's volume. Knudsen considers the implications of the crisis for the political relations between Palestinians and Lebanese at the elite level (in Knudsen and Hanafi, pp. 97–110). Palestinians do not have a formal political voice in Lebanon as they are denied the right to vote, but this does not prevent the existence of a multitude of relations between Palestinian groups and Lebanese political parties, which Knudsen charts and explores. Some of the most controversial political issues in Lebanon surround the Palestinian refugees, particularly about granting civil rights and their potential long-term settlement in the country. The perspectives of four major political parties—two Lebanese (Future Movement and Hizbollah) and two Palestinian (Hamas and Fateh)—are analysed by Knudsen, thus revealing the multiple layers of political division and alliances. He also examines the setting up and role of the ministerial committee, the Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee, referred to by many, sarcastically, as the Lebanese–Palestinian Monologue Committee for its lack of Palestinian participation (*ibid.*, p. 102). One aspect of the Palestinian political landscape Knudsen discusses—that support for the PLO and Fateh have weakened, while that for Hamas has grown—is a change that has also been taking place in other Palestinian communities. And this has all been happening in a context where Lebanon has also been changing: Hizbollah, the Shi'a movement, which is the most sympathetic to giving the Palestinians equal rights and citizenship, has become a key player in the Lebanese political arena. Things may well change further for the Palestinians in Lebanon in such a context—but given Lebanon's volatile history, any changes will be unlikely to happen smoothly or without political instability.

One of the key concepts to emerge from the many excellent contributions in Knudsen and Hanafi's collection is the use of Agamben's 'state of exception' in which the operation of laws are suspended due to a crisis or state of emergency—a situation that can become prolonged and which works to deprive individuals of their citizenship (Knudsen and Hanafi, p. 5). One can easily see how this has become a popular concept in refugee studies and the Palestinian situation is no different in this regard. Camps, in particular, have been popularly represented as difficult-to-govern slums that create security risks for the host country thus necessitating (and excusing) repressive measures to keep them under control. Given the history of relations between the PLO and Arab governments,

particularly Jordan and Lebanon where the PLO was accused of setting up 'a state within a state', this is hardly surprising. Challenging the characterisation of refugees as security risks, however, and inspired by Foucault and Agamben, Hanafi employs the lens of segregation (rather than security) to an analysis of the camps of Nahr el-Barad and Yarmouk (in Syria) (in Knudsen and Hanafi, pp. 29–49). He concludes that 'it is only when Palestinian refugees are subject to systematic discrimination and urban marginalisation that their communities have become problematic from a security point of view' (*ibid.*, p. 43).

It is clear from all of the books under review here that the camps should not be regarded as fixed, closed entities—they are, in fact, fluid social spaces that host Palestinian refugees in different periods of their lives (with many choosing to reside outside at some points), as well as hosting new immigrant and migrant communities. Dorai's exploration of Mar Elias camp in Lebanon (in Knudsen and Hanafi, pp. 67–80) shows that while camps remain marginalised, segregated areas, '[t]he presence of this non-Palestinian population in refugee camps leads us to reconsider the traditional perception of refugee camps and to view them as spaces of urban relegation' (in Knudsen and Hanafi, p. 78). Recognising camps as complex urban environments (or what Misselwitz calls 'urban CampCities'), however, has not made comprehensive camp improvement and strategic urban planning any easier. Misselwitz (in Knudsen and Hanafi, pp. 81–96) charts the problems that arose when an UNRWA-Stuttgart project, started in 2006, tried to initiate improvements in Al Fawwar camp (southern West Bank) through the use of participatory planning. The lack of trust between UNRWA and the camp representatives was tangible and showed the limitations of 'bottom-up' participatory approaches.

The role of UNRWA is indeed a controversial and complex one. As the largest UN agency, with 29,000 employees (most of them Palestinian), it is regarded by some to be a 'quasi-government' (Roberts, p. 144) with 'phantom sovereignty' in Lebanon and Syria (Hanafi, in Knudsen and Hanafi, p. 30). And yet its institutional foundations are weak due to its mandate being renewed every three to five years (a situation that prevents long-term planning), and its recurrent budget deficits. Furthermore, the signing of the Oslo Accords was supposed to alter the relationship between UNRWA, refugee and host country as it required a discussion of handover starting first with the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Peace Implementation Program from 1993 to 2000 was designed to set up permanent socioeconomic structures in the OPT, integrate the camps within neighbouring municipalities, and UNRWA was to prepare to phase itself out. But refugees in the OPT resisted this and set up political campaigns insisting that the right of return be placed back centre-stage.

By the late 1990s, for a variety of different political reasons, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Arab League had also condemned any plan to move away from the right of return. However, as outlined earlier, Oslo and subsequent negotiations instituted dramatic changes in the way the right of return was conceived—with repatriation largely being reinterpreted as being to the territories of the future Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In

preliminary planning, therefore, the Palestinian Authority (PA) assumed the repatriation of 760,000 Palestinians to the OPT by 2015, which would increase its population by one-third (Brynen and El-Rifai, p. 11). A number of chapters in the Brynen and El-Rifai collection analyse the developmental challenges to absorbing so many people in such a short space of time. Brynen's chapter warns that while it is possible to envisage 1 million returnees, the OPT would struggle to absorb one-tenth of this (*ibid.*, p. 106). He offers an assessment of the huge economic implications of such a repatriation, which would most likely include downward pressure on wages, upward pressure on prices, and increased unemployment, as well as pressure on already-pressed public services and infrastructure. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, who would feel the most pressure to repatriate, would also pose a particular problem, according to Brynen, as they are more likely to be unskilled and semiskilled workers with low levels of education and little savings or capital resources. The cost of providing housing for 500,000 returnees, as well as providing for the 650,000 camp residents in the OPT, could be between \$4.4 billion and \$6.6 billion—a figure that is way beyond the PA's fiscal abilities and donor generosity (Brynen in Brynen and El-Rifai, p. 118).

One often mooted solution for refugee resettlement is that of using evacuated Israeli settlements. It is estimated that if Israel withdrew from all of the OPT then housing stock would satisfy 40 per cent (100,000) of the PA's projected West Bank housing needs (Aronson and de Jong, in Brynen and El-Rifai, p. 223). Despite the fact that Israel is expanding its settlements in the West Bank, not evacuating them, there are a number of problems with this proposition, as explored by Aronson and de Jong. They argue that the per capita operation and maintenance for settlement housing is far higher than the average within Israel, never mind what the PA could afford. In addition, the settlement housing that would be more useful, i.e. in and around Jerusalem, is unlikely to be evacuated (Aronson and de Jong, in Brynen and El-Rifai, pp. 219–227).

The nature of the return programme and the 'package' of infrastructural measures to be implemented will thus continue to be the subject of research and debate. What is clear, however, is that refugee participation in this decision is paramount not only because it will not be sustainable otherwise, but also for the sake of justice. While acknowledging the centrality of repatriation and resettlement to a solution, Samy's chapter (in Knudsen and Hanafi, pp. 147–162) explores the politics of saying 'sorry' and reparations as a form of transitional justice rather than a legal or technical issue. She highlights how Israel treats the refugee issue as a humanitarian condition, while the Palestinians see it as an injustice that should be resolved through international law. And herein lies the crux of the matter—and the source of radical disagreement. Key external actors, such as the EU, thus face a problem: how to support a resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue based on international law while, at the same time, dealing with Israel's rejection of voluntary repatriation (a position broadly backed by the US) (Dumper, in Brynen and El-Rifai, p. 80). But then faith in bodies such as the EU and the UN to produce a just and durable solution to the situation has diminished. Ethnic sectarian projects, of which Israel is one, argues Peteet,

inevitably produces displacement and spaces of containment in their bid for forcible homogenised national entities (Peteet in Knudsen and Hanafi, pp. 13–27). And this is likely to continue as indicated by the continued settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, the acceleration in the revocation of Palestinian East Jerusalem residency rights, and the inclusion of politicians in the Israeli Cabinet who advocate the ‘forced transfer’ of the Palestinians resident inside Israel to the OPT.

One of the main problems facing the Palestinian refugees—as indeed the Palestinians in general—is that the Palestinian body politic is scattered and fragmented across historic Palestine and its neighbouring Arab states. This was originally countered by having a unified national movement speaking for everyone in the OPT, in the camps and in the wider *shatat*. However, the PLO as a unifying body has been weakened, argues Sayigh, by the post-Oslo leadership, thus ‘reinforcing separation between diasporic regions, Resistance group affiliations and socio-economic interests’ (Sayigh, in Knudsen and Hanafi, p. 50). She makes a strong case for the importance of ‘group rights’ and for camp-based refugees as a distinct collectivity with latent group consciousness ‘that entitle them to representation in national institutions, in settlement negotiations and in a future Palestinian polity’ (ibid., p. 53). And there is indeed a popular desire for ‘authentic representation’ through elections to the PLO, as revealed through the findings of the Civitas project which facilitated discussions amongst Palestinian refugees in a self-designed civil needs assessment exercise across more than 10 Arab countries and 13 non-Arab countries (ibid., p. 61). Ensuring the participation of the refugees is a necessary part of sustaining Palestinian identity and reconstructing the national movement for what is likely to be a protracted struggle.

There is a growing body of academic literature on the Palestinian refugees and the three books under review are excellent examples of the multiple layers of analysis and debate currently taking place. By focusing on the social rather than the political implications of the refugees’ protracted displacement and uncertain future they provide the reader with a rich picture of the complex problems facing Palestinian refugees and the obstacles to a potential resolution of the issue. While some recent books have challenged the idea that the Palestinian refugees are an exceptional case (Dumper 2007), Roberts’ book strongly argues that the Palestinians *are* regarded and treated differently from other refugee populations. Her analysis of the day-to-day life and coping mechanisms of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon provides the type of micro-level detail that enriches our understanding of the impacts of long-term displacement and so puts flesh on the bones of figures and statistics. Brynen and El-Rifai’s book, on the other hand, was aimed largely at policymakers. Although critics have argued that its relevance has been challenged by recent developments, it nevertheless filled an important niche in the literature. Practical analyses of this sort will remain crucial—particularly, as is the case here, from some of the leading writers in this field. It is Knudsen and Hanafi’s book, however, that will frame the academic discourse for some years to come.² This is in the context of a growing realisation

that the peace process has come unstuck and that the refugees are likely to remain a feature of the Middle Eastern political landscape for a few more years to come, as well as the fact that the refugees are increasingly framed as constituting security risks for the host countries. Knudsen and Hanafi have made a serious attempt to consolidate emerging analyses of governance, space and identity through the application of concepts such as the 'state of exception' and 'phantom sovereignty' to study how to govern what Mark Duffield (2007) would refer to as a 'surplus population'. But, as some of the chapters in Knudsen and Hanafi analyse (particularly Sayigh's), and the events of Nakba Day referred to at the beginning of this review perhaps indicate, the Palestinian refugees themselves are not quite ready to be regarded as such.

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Notes

- 1 In the case of Syria, Israel's border fence divides Syria from the Golan Heights occupied by Israel after 1967. For the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the 'green line' is the official boundary with the exception of East Jerusalem which was formally annexed by Israel in 1980.
- 2 I am grateful to Sibylle Stamm for this point.

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Third World Revolutions Left to Smoulder

The Declarations of Havana by Fidel Castro. Introduction by Tariq Ali. London, New York: Verso, 2008. Pp. 120 + notes. £7.99 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-84467-156-4.

On Practice and Contradiction by Mao Tse-Tung. Introduction by Slavoj Žižek. London, New York: Verso, 2007. Pp. 186 + notes. £8.99 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-844467-587-6.

Down with Colonialism! by Ho Chi Minh. Introduction by Walden Bello. London, New York: Verso, 2007. Pp. 216 + notes. £7.19 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-84467-177-9.

The 'Revolutions' series published by Verso across the last few years has reprinted a wide variety of classic revolutionary texts, with introductions written by leading radical activists and thinkers of today. According to the publisher, these introductions are intended to 'set ablaze' the classic revolutionary writings. With the exception of Slavoj Žižek's introductory essay to the collection of Mao's writings, in the case of the other two collections reviewed here the effect is less that of setting the writings 'ablaze' as much as trying to light a fire with a damp fuse.

What unites each of these three collections is the theme of revolutionary anti-imperialism, attached to three epochal twentieth century revolutions: the Chinese (1949), Vietnamese (1975) and Cuban (1959). The books stand out for their high production values, with their colourful, striking front covers. They are also relatively cheap. At least as far as the front covers are concerned, this makes a change for the texts inside. Otherwise these collections of speeches, articles, interviews, proclamations and other texts are likely only be found in battered old pamphlet form, published many decades ago either by Progress Publishers of Moscow or the Foreign Languages Press of Peking, mouldering on the shelves of second hand bookshops.

Some of the texts in these collections are famous, such as Castro's speech 'History will Absolve Me', delivered at his defence trial after the failed attempt to overthrow the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1953. Another is an interview with Mao where he made apparent his grim confidence that China's strength of numbers would overwhelm even a nuclear assault by the US. Also reproduced is the famous 1945 'Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam', a document self-consciously modelled on the US Declaration of Independence in order to attract US support in the Vietnamese against French imperialism. Other texts are more obscure, such as a 1924 article by Ho on the workers' movement in Turkey. Across all three collections, the texts variously offer analysis, guidance, exhortation and criticism in the course of anti-imperialist struggles in the Third World.

The collections do provide insight into key aspects of these struggles. For example, the conscious effort to harness nationalism to the cause of a Communist revolution is apparent in Ho's 1941 'Letter from Abroad'. The writings of each of the three leaders make an explicit effort to set their own contemporaneous struggle against the backdrop of national histories of revolution and resistance to foreign oppression. Strikingly, each of the three leaders demonstrate an acute awareness of international forces and consistently contextualise their national struggles against the wider panorama of anti-imperial resistance and Cold War rivalry of the time. One example is Ho's 1951 'Political Report at the Second National Congress of the Viet Nam Workers' Party', in which he discusses US policy in East Asia as well as Western Europe. Similarly in the 'Second Declaration of Havana' Castro places Cuba's struggle against the backdrop not only of imperialism in the Americas but also in the wider Third World as a whole, with some side-swipes at the failures of Soviet foreign policy in supporting Third World revolution. It is the collection of Ho's writings that provides the most detailed insight into how he and his followers actually practised revolutionary anti-imperialist warfare, with attention given variously to the economic aspects of the struggle, propaganda and the principles of guerrilla warfare.

The texts reviewed here are of course widely available on the Internet. All can be found on the Marxists' Internet Archive or elsewhere. While it is useful to have these texts in a book format even if readily available elsewhere for free, it does mean that their publication as books should offer some value-added beyond the front covers. Some of this value-added comes in the form of detailed footnotes, providing the detail of names, context and factual background to the text. The collection of Ho's writings, *Down with Colonialism!*, also has a glossary of terms and a chronology of Vietnamese history. Each of the books has good suggestions for further reading on the topics concerned.

Where the books have less to commend them however is their introductions. Tariq Ali's introduction to the Castro collection for example is a mere six pages, which rushes through Cuba's history of anti-imperialist revolt, provides barely any biography of Castro himself, offers a scant few lines covering Cuba's history in the Cold War and nothing since. This despite the fact that the state that Castro

created—unlike that of either Ho or Mao—has survived without being opened up to global capitalism since the end of the Cold War, something which surely merits some reflection on the nature of the revolution that established it.

Ali's summary judgement of Castro's revolution is offered in two lines: one line trotting out the first and last defence of the revolution (its achievements in public health), and another single line offering a roundabout criticism of Castro's authoritarianism that Ali attributes to Castro's 'mimicry' of Soviet state structures. No justification for the selection of texts is given, nor is any attempt made to contextualise them and judge them in relation to Castro's own personal biography or the revolutionary history of Cuba. Ali betrays his own scepticism when he finishes his introductory essay by saying that Castro has already been elevated to the pantheon of Latin American revolutionary heroes such as Simon Bolívar and José Martí (Ali, in Castro, p. xii.). The underlying message is that revolutionary Cuba belongs to the past, for what could the reality of Cuba today offer to the world?

If Bello's introduction to Ho's writings is by contrast longer than Ali's at 20 pages, it is ultimately no more inspired. It is superior to Ali's introduction in that it charts Ho's life and times, some of the key questions of political and revolutionary policy that he confronted, inter alia his negotiations with the French, his relations with the Soviets and land reforms aimed at winning the support of the peasantry. Bello's introduction raises the standard question about the precise nature of the balance between Ho's nationalism and communism (though in fact the two meshed together in Ho's Comintern-inspired brand of Stalinism). Bello's critical engagement with Ho's politics is no less perfunctory. Ho's policy of compromise and concession with the national bourgeoisie and post-war French re-occupation is praised as evidence of his pragmatic acumen, while his murderous response towards Vietnam's Trotskyites—charged as 'agents of fascism' in the characteristically paranoid Stalinist vein (Ho, p. xxv)—is acknowledged but minimised.

Bello's cursory reckoning of an important historical controversy speaks to the weakness of his introduction as a whole, which never has sufficient depth or nuance to reach any measured, overall judgement of the Vietnamese revolution and its place in twentieth century history. A postscript to the introduction wonders what Ho would have made of Vietnam's opening up to capitalism at the end of the last century, and lamely claims that Ho would surely have adopted a more benevolent and intelligent policy as against the errors of Vietnamese economic policy since unification and the oppression of the Sino-Vietnamese minority. No effort is made to set the Vietnamese revolution in perspective against the Viet Nam of today and its prospects. Like Ali's introduction, no justification is offered for the selection of texts, although more effort is made to contextualise them.

If Ali's and Bello's introductions fizzle out long before they reach their powder, Žižek's sets off a small pyrotechnic display that not only does not ignite his material, but even leaves it in the shadows, as the fireworks whizz off in all directions. Žižek advances a typically convoluted and multilayered argument,

suggesting that Mao's lack of a sufficiently dialectical revolutionary theory directly led to the destructiveness and divisiveness of his rule as embodied in the 1966–76 Cultural Revolution. According to Žižek, Mao's belief that social antagonisms and contradiction between opposing forces were perpetual eliminated the possibility of establishing a stable, new type of political order and society. The result was that the only means of preserving the creative energies of revolution was an order that constantly subverted itself: hence the uninterrupted turmoil and upheaval, as seen in the Cultural Revolution. By Žižek's reckoning, the violence of the Cultural Revolution is testimony not to its revolutionary excess but rather its ultimate ineffectualness: violence substitutes for progressive, revolutionary social change. Hence Žižek's designation, borrowed from Jonathan Spence, of Mao as the Marxist 'Lord of Misrule'—likening his role to that of those individuals who were appointed to preside over the tumult and inversion of social roles seen in medieval carnivals.

Žižek's argument here is subtle: far from exonerating Mao's misrule, he is seeking to explain it in a way that avoids the usual bugbears of attributing misrule to the depravity of single individuals or asserting the necessity that all revolutions must end in totalitarian failure. On the one hand this argument accomplishes what neither Ali nor Bello do: it provides a distillation of the political role of the leader concerned, decisively locates their place in history and even relates this to contemporary China and its integration into global capitalism. Žižek is right to acknowledge Mao's significance in twentieth century politics when he says that 'his name stands for the political mobilisation of the hundreds of millions of anonymous Third World toilers whose labour provides the invisible "substance", background of historical development' (Žižek in Mao, p. 2).

On the other hand, if Žižek does not attribute all of China's ills to Mao's depravity but rather to his failings as a revolutionary theoretician, he performs the same basic error in vesting Mao as an individual with more significance than he deserves in explaining the dynamics of the Chinese revolution. Žižek's tack also leads him to endow Mao's writings and utterances with a dignity they do not deserve. To be sure, Mao's statements should be given their proper political weight, however odd they might sound at a great distance removed from the twentieth century rural masses for whom they were intended. No doubt Mao was accomplished at translating political ideas of revolution, mass mobilisation and guerrilla warfare into slogans and ideas that could be more easily appropriated by peasants.

But to endow Mao's pronouncements with the dignity of dialectical speculation or profound ethical thought is not only eccentric, but has no necessity. When Mao is musing about the evolution of animals in the distant future (which Žižek discusses), his statements should be recognised outright for what they are—idiotic ramblings induced by megalomania accustomed to having every utterance taken for oracular insight. Mao's indifference to mass suffering that Žižek takes as evidence of a 'terrifying' and 'cosmic' perspective reflects the rather more

prosaic truth of an individual whose massive power alienated him from merely human concerns.

Likewise the more prosaic explanation for Mao's carnival of misrule—churning up the ranks beneath him was a means of consolidating his own power—offers an account of the Cultural Revolution that does not require us to impute arcane insight to Mao's writings. Žižek's attempt to infuse the historical legacy of Mao with a contemporary relevance—notably Mao's refusal to be cowed by US nuclear superiority—falls down. By Žižek's own reckoning, it was Mao's failure to build a viable post-revolutionary order that made the restoration of capitalism in China inevitable (Žižek in Mao, p. 26). What model is fit for emulation in Mao's misrule is obscure.

For all the usual esoteric dazzle that accompanies Žižek's work, he too ultimately fails to provide what is lacking in the other two introductory essays: a measured and historical perspective on these texts that inspired mass uprisings and revolution. Even only a few decades ago, the messages of these three leaders might have offered plenty of experience directly of use and guidance for Third World revolutionaries seeking to overthrow neo-colonial regimes and concerned with questions of people's war, revolutionary strategy and national liberation. That such messages have no audience today can only mean that the introductory essays accompanying these texts should have been historical in orientation rather than indeterminately hovering between a past not dead and future yet unborn.

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Notes on Contributor

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