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Micheline Centlivres-Demont, ed., *Afghanistan: Identity, Society and Politics since 1980*, I.B. Tauris, 2015, xxii + 316 pp., \$99.00 US (hbk), ISBN 9781784530815.

This edited volume is a collection of 74 articles that were originally published from 1982-2013 in *Afghanistan Info*, a newsletter printed in French, English, and German in Switzerland. Micheline Centlivres-Demont served as the editor-in-chief of this newsletter. The European and American contributors to the book are widely portrayed as “experts” or “specialists” on Afghanistan.

During the second half of the twentieth century—especially during its first three decades—Afghanistan became a battlefield for the “Cold War” in which the United States and some of its regional and Western European allies competed with the USSR and its allies for domination through various “development” and pseudo-modernization projects. The Euro-American participation in this war was accompanied by several academic research projects by anthropologists and political scientists. After the downfall of the Afghan monarchy in 1978 virtually all Euro-American projects in Afghanistan were terminated. Some of the participants in these projects moved on to Euro-American imperial humanitarian programs (e.g., NGOs, or non-governmental organizations) dealing mainly with the predicament of millions of Afghan migrants (dubbed “refugees” in Euro-America) in Pakistan and the production of academic and political writings about the various aspects of the cultural, political, and social format and dynamics of the new and increasingly destabilized political economy of Afghanistan. These chaotic dynamics are misleadingly labeled “revolution” and/or “rebellion” in most Western academic and political narratives.

One such academic and political project was the *Afghanistan Info* newsletter founded in 1982 by Micheline Centlivres-Demont. Prior to 1978 Centlivres-Demont and her husband, Pierre Centlivres, travelled extensively and conducted ethnographic research in Afghanistan. The results of their excursions are published in several books and journal articles. *Afghanistan Info* started as a popular European venue for the circulation of political views opposing the leftist revolutionary turn in Afghanistan with an attitude of “how dare the communists deny us access to our imperial subjects.” In subsequent years (from the 1990s to the present) the underlying anti-Soviet agenda of what was published in *Afghanistan Info* during its early years gradually shifted into expressions of disappointment, frustration, and implicit regret in the glaring realities of American sponsored destabilization, fragmentation, and outright destruction of Afghanistan and the consequent emergence of Muslim fundamentalism in the region. Thus the 1980s anti-communist tone of *Afghanistan Info* gave way to anti-Muslim-

fundamentalism associated with the Taleban movement. Much of the *Afghanistan Info* writings about the latter are tinted with the usual Euro-American “blaming the victim” imperial attitude toward the Other.

*Afghanistan: Identity, Society and Politics since 1980* starts with a helpful introduction by Olivier Roy that attempts to integrate the wide-ranging subjects of the essays—local and state politics, nomads, ethnicity, gender relations, migration, music, identity politics, religion, etc.—into a coherent discourse. Other than gender inequality, other forms of relations of power do not attract the gaze of the contributors to this volume. Several of the more than six dozen articles in this collection have a common author. The book is divided into five parts. Part I, “The PDPA Regime, 1978-89,” includes 14 essays some of which provide descriptive and political overviews of the collapse of the Afghan monarchy during 1978, the Soviet military intervention during 1980, the American response through the production of the *mujahedeen* (Arabic, “holy strugglers”) terrorist gangs (dubbed “anti-Soviet resistance”), migration of a large number of Afghans to Pakistan, the effect of the new order on gender relations in Afghanistan, the differential political effect of the PDPA (the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan) on various ethnic groups, and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1987.

Part II, “The Mujahedeen Movement, 1990-1995,” is highlighted by essays dealing with the fall of the PDPA government, the internationalization of the so called *jihad* (Arabic, holy struggle) against the Soviet Union, the Pashtunistan issue, Hazara identity politics, examples of urban and rural responses to the collapse of the Afghan center, and the rise of the Taleban movement. Some of the articles in Part III, “Afghanistan Under the Taliban, 1996-2001,” deal with the decline of American presence in Afghanistan, the emergence of the Taleban rule and domination in some regions of Afghanistan and in some sectors of the political economy of the country, notes about the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, music among the Afghan diaspora in Europe, and the destruction of some parts of the Kabul Museum and the theft of some of its holdings. Part IV, “After the Taliban,” includes pieces about the decline of the Taleban regime in Afghanistan, the prospects of an American sponsored Islamic state, transformations in the Buzkashi game, the predicament of the Uzbek ethnic community in northern Afghanistan, a demographic overview of the nomadic population, Afghanistan’s relationship with Pakistan, and attempts at reconstruction and the political and cultural obstacles for the rehabilitation of fragmented and destabilized Afghanistan. Some notable essays in Part V, “An Evolving Future,” include: “The Afghan Roots of the Neo-Taliban Movement”; “NGOs and Afghanistan: New Challenges, Old Dilemmas”; “Afghanistan and the Global Failure of Counter-Narcotics”; “The Hazaras in Afghanistan: Origins and Linguistic Evidence”; “The Future of the Afghan National Army: Problems and Reforms”; “China and Afghanistan: A New Phase?”; and “Afghanistan 2014: Another Excuse for Yet More Disaster.” Appended to the 74 essays are notes about the terrorist Mujahedeen parties and a chronology of events from 1973 to 2014.

Overall, *Afghanistan: Identity, Society and Politics since 1980* is a timely and informative multi-authored and multi-focused collection of academic and political glances by European and American observers—as well as a few Westernized local writers—at the structures and dynamics in the civil and political society of Afghanistan during the past four decades. Academic specialists and interested corners in popular culture will find useful—albeit in some cases ideologically conditioned—descriptions and analyses of the causes and consequences of the violent encounter between pre-industrial Afghanistan and competing major industrial players in the Cold War, global capital, resurgent Islam, and enraged American imperial stupor.

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