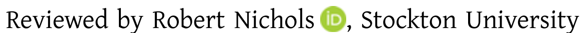
woman and owner of a school, also ends her own life when Mirkhân forces her to shut down her school. Talajooy notes that Beyzaie wrote this part for a festival entitled "1001 Nights–today" in Denmark, where it was staged by Alan Lyddiard at the Betty Nansen Theatre in 2002. He then wrote the other parts and staged the full play in Tehran in Autumn 2003.

Overall, the play invites the audience to confront a question with important repercussions: What impact has silencing women had on indigenous Persian culture? Talajooy's critical essay–published as an appendix to the play–is an extremely helpful guide for any reader interested in a deeper understanding of the play in the context of Beyzaie's life and work. The translation itself is particularly timely, as Iranian women and girls continue to spearhead an unprecedented emancipatory movement in Iran and the Middle East following the death-in-police custody of the twenty-two-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Jina Amini in September 2022. As Talajooy writes in his critical essay, "Beyzaie's heroines act as role models for women not just for the sake of women but also for the roles such women can play in subverting the vicious cycle of female desire and male aspiration that produces toxic masculinity" (p. 138). Revisiting, appreciating, and enacting such multilayered and rich characters has never felt more urgent and resonant than now, as Iranian women's struggle continues to inspire citizens of the world in the battle against misogyny and toxic masculinity.

doi:10.1017/irn.2023.58

Afghan Crucible, The Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan. Elisabeth Leake (Oxford University Press, 2022). i-xxii, 343 pages, maps. ISBN: 978-0-19-884601-7 hardback

Afghanistan's Lost Futures

Reviewed by Robert Nichols , Stockton University

(Received 24 August 2023; accepted 2 September 2023)

Afghan Crucible offers a comprehensive narrative based on an exceptional synthesis of the sources now available to help understand the long and bloody civil war that led to the country's destruction in the years of the Soviet military occupation (1979–1989) and after. The book analyzes the war as a complex entanglement of local, regional, and international dynamics, arguing that fighting continued for years because competing Afghan voices with differing visions of modernity (constitutionalist, monarchist, socialist, Islamist) were never allowed to settle their differences internally. Instead, domestic conflict was continually inflamed and structured by regional neighbors (Pakistan, Iran, China), Cold War competitors (USSR, USA), and global ideological influences.

Drawing on a wide range of original archival sources and documents, especially Soviet materials, the chapters situate Afghan events within global historical processes of Asian nationalism, decolonization, modernization, non-alignment, the rise of Islamist discourses, and alternatives to western models. Full discussion using citations from globally comparative secondary literature integrates the most recent scholarship from each thematic field so that events in Afghanistan are fully contextualized. Elisabeth Leake tells stories familiar from earlier, now standard, references, but gives substantial background to issues and dynamics

https://doi.org/10.1017/irn.2023.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press

often given only an incomplete or passing mention in previous studies due to research and bibliography limits.[1]

An introduction and nine chapters begin with the pre-history of the war ("1. Afghanistan's Many Pasts"). As a historical chronology follows the war through its many phases and complications, the book chapters are structured by location ("2. Kabul," "3. Moscow," "4. Islamabad," etc., ending with "8. Geneva" and "9. Back to Kabul"). This approach allows discussion of key personalities and issues tied to each location, which are then placed in the framing of the war as a unique moment when local activists became entangled with the effects of Iran's Islamic revolution, China's competition with the USSR, and Pakistan's internal Islamization and militarization.

Analysis notes that the communist government that took power in Kabul in 1978 envisioned a future offering modernist, state-planned economic and social change; at the same time, Islamist parties in Kabul, then in exile in Peshawar, had forward-looking plans of another kind of modernity, one that did not involve a return to some imagined ideal past. Rather than simply "fundamentalists," the Islamist resistance parties gathering in Peshawar during the war were each other's competitors, each offering differing party structures and leadership models. In the end, external forces helped marginalize constitutional, royalist, Maoist, and non-Sunni religious contenders, reducing the war to a binary narrative of the secular, socialist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan versus the Islamist resistance parties. Leake details how neither side of this contingent divide, shaped in part by Cold War discourses and Pakistani policy choices, was able to unify fractious personalities and interests, or manage transitions from policy pronouncements to effective implementation strategies.

Histories of the Soviet-Afghan war first emerged as Cold War narratives and often valorized individuals such as Ahmad Shah Massoud and demonized the communist governments in Kabul. Academic histories have listed resistance parties, parsed Islamist influences and factions, and emphasized flows of external material support. This study has the facts of the core narrative, while fully exploring the official policy and public statements of Afghan political parties, regional national-states, and international organizations, including the United Nations Security Council and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. The text places the social and land reform policy failures of Kabul's communist governments led by Taraki, Amin, Karmal, and Najibullah in relation to earlier Afghan reform efforts. But Leake also notes that the P.D.P.A. socialist state-building project, at first based on the 1917 Russian Revolution, adjusted, backtracked, and continued over a longer period than the reforming years of Amanullah or Zahir Shah.

Afghan Crucible reflects a recent moment in Afghanistan scholarship; a moment in which western scholars were allowed to mine Soviet archives to trace Russian/Soviet policies related to Afghanistan and general Soviet practices of state-building and modernization in the developing world and post-colonial states.[2] Leake notes how Afghan Marxists ignored Soviet state-building experience and advice, including suggestions to go gently with policies on land reform and social change. The author discusses her research choices and options. Dari and Pashto language sources were approached through translations and secondary sources.

This history illuminates the limits of Soviet understandings of rural, Asian, and Muslim societies. It details the failure of Soviet state-builders to resolve the factionalism, nepotism, corruption, and brutality that foreclosed success for their Afghan allies in the P.D.P.A.

[1] Such standard references include: Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princton University Press, 1973); Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan, A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2010).

[2] Examples of this moment include: Robert Crews, *Afghanistan Modern, The History of a Global Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion, Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

https://doi.org/10.1017/irn.2023.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Unfortunately, as the study concludes, many of these limits in foreign understanding resonate with similar limits shown during the intervention in Afghanistan after September 2001.

Leake's cogent, thoughtful commentary and summaries add depth and nuance to discussions of well-studied issues and events. If it was not inevitable that the P.D.P.A. and Islamist parties based in Pakistan be the only two contenders for rule in Afghanistan in the 1980s, Leake argues that this became the reality as local Afghan changes were focused and driven by the regional political agendas of Pakistan, Iran, and China, alongside U.S.-Soviet Cold War competition and resources.

A strength of different chapters is the tracing of the meaning of war experiences for individuals and communities caught up in relentless violence and displacement. A great irony for those who rejected Afghan communist and Islamist visions of a new modernity, and fled to refugee camps in Pakistan, was that foreign aid providers—including the U.N.H.C.R. operating under Pakistan government restrictions—cared for Afghans in modernist systems of registration and social services that also disrupted previous community ways of life. Leake writes a history of the lost futures imagined by Afghans and places this particular story within a global context of similarly disruptive, often equally tragic, histories that have recurred in a deeply flawed global system of national-states and international organizations.

doi:10.1017/irn.2023.57

https://doi.org/10.1017/irn.2023.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press