



books

The Mystery of Capital

by **Hernando de Soto**
(Black Swan ISBN 13579108642)

Private Planet

by **David Cromwell**
(John Carpenter ISBN 1897766629)

'Capitalism appears increasingly as the leit-motif of a self-serving guild of businessmen and their technocracies.'

This is not the sort of assertion you'd expect to read in a book that comes with fulsome praise from Margaret Thatcher, *The Economist* and the god-father of neoliberal economics himself, Milton Friedman. But then, the Peruvian intellectual pragmatist Hernando de Soto is a legendary jester

to this 'self-serving guild' and, most recently, to the venal Alberto Fujimori, the former dictator of Peru who is now a fugitive in Japan.

Which is not to imply that de Soto has nothing of interest to say. **The Mystery of Capital** invents and then confronts its own riddle: 'Why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else.' He explores some diverting byways, particularly the notion that poor people have more assets than they are permitted to realize. This, he concludes, is because they lack private property rights. How so? Well, triumphant capitalism in the West has, it seems, simply forgotten about them everywhere else. It just needs a gentle reminder, presumably in the form of this eulogy from de Soto. According to *Time*, he 'has heads of state from Haiti to Pakistan lining up for his advice'. They would be better off making plans to join Fujimori in Japan.

David Cromwell gives us a much more rewarding guide to 'corporate plunder and the fight back'. Written in fluent, unpreten-

tious prose, **Private Planet** is the best summary so far of corporate globalization and the urgent reasons there are to resist it. Anyone who wants to catch up and join in should start here. Perhaps it would be too much to expect new insights as well. Sometimes it's enough just to be nudged very persuasively in the right direction.

RATING ★★ (De Soto)
RATING ★★★★★ (Cromwell) DR

Reflections on Exile

by **Edward W Said**
(Granta, ISBN 1862074445)

This book gathers together 46 of Edward W Said's essays on politics and culture, written over the course of 35 years. Renowned both within and beyond the Palestinian diaspora, the experience of exile imbues everything that Said writes. He tackles grand themes such as nationalism, colonization and identity but also finds space for such diverse interests as Johnny Weissmuller's Tarzan and the musical artistry of Glenn Gould. Whatever the subject, the author brings clarity of thought and intellectual rigour to its consideration. Although he can occasionally tend to the abstruse and academically rarefied (for instance in two essays on Michel Foucault, himself no stranger to obscurantism) his prose style is usually eminently lucid and comprehensible. The series of appraisals of other authors – Hemingway, Orwell, Conrad, Naipaul – is particularly absorbing and thought-provoking.

This erudite and humane book is a timely reminder that, alongside political resistance, there is such a thing as cultural resistance. Living well and treasuring learning can and must be a bulwark against oppression and the brainless violence of the powerful.

RATING ★★★★★ PW

By The Sea

by **Abdulrazak Gurnah**
(Bloomsbury, ISBN: 0747552800)

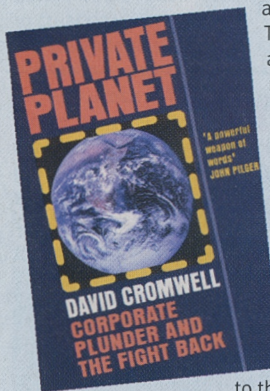
Abdulrazak Gurnah's sixth novel tells the interwoven stories of two men and their families. Set in two seaside towns half-a-world

apart, the book opens as Saleh Omar arrives in Britain on a dank November day to claim asylum. He has with him a mahogany box containing incense and a passport that claims his name is Rajab Shaaban. Although he understands every word said to him, he pretends to be unable to speak English and the immigration officials call upon Latif Mahmud, an expatriate academic, to translate.

Mahmud's links with Omar are much closer than a shared exile from their homeland, the Indian Ocean island of Zanzibar. As Omar's application for refugee status is processed, the men tell their stories and the plot becomes a complex maze, winding back upon itself in an intricate pattern of trickery and betrayal, lies, debts and revenge. The personal tales are set against the nightmarish post-colonial history of Zanzibar which, after the departure of the British in 1964, suffered decades of massive political upheavals and brutal civil strife. Omar and Mahmud's interpretation of these chaotic life-shattering events give the book its backbone and substance and make it, despite a measured and meditative style, an enthralling read.

Abdulrazak Gurnah was himself forced to flee Zanzibar during the events his book describes and in **By The Sea** he has transmuted personal experience into a novel which explores, with great depth and subtlety, the human histories behind the words we bandy about so freely and with so little understanding: exile, dispossession, displaced person, refugee, asylum-seeker.

RATING ★★★★★ PW
www.bloomsbury.com



Between 1994 and 2001 photographer Melanie Friend made several visits to Kosovo, photographing and interviewing the same people. Their contexts changed of course: a refugee camp on the Macedonian border in 1999, for example, gave way to a ruined house within UN-controlled Pristina a year later. In the case of one refugee woman and her daughter, home became a British seaside town.

In a province awash with photojournalists, Friend consciously decided not to take pictures of 'nameless people crying as they streamed across the border on tractors' – although, she acknowledges, such images were 'necessary'. Instead she decided to 'work slowly, taking studio-style portraits of individuals, spending time with them over several visits, and listening to their stories – if they wished to tell them'. Nor did she seek out sensationalist stories or 'worst' experiences but 'people I could engage with – spark in the eyes, an intensity'. The result – **No Place Like Home – Echoes from Kosovo** (Midnight Editions, ISBN 1573441198) – is a work that conveys humanity and dignity in adversity, reminiscent of Dorothea Lange's classic portraits from the US Great Depression.

Often Friend does not picture people at all but places – and spaces – where something has happened, something has been taken

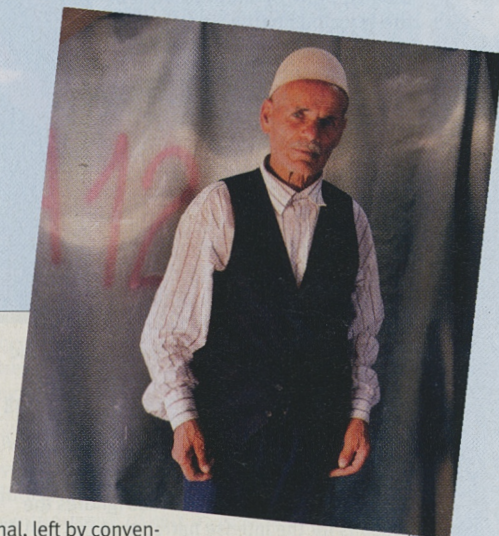
away: the living room where a police raid occurred, the hillside above the village where a massacre took place.

While focusing on the spaces, Friend paradoxically also fills the gaps, both political and emotional, left by conventional news reporting. By going back to her subjects she can trace the changes in not only their lives but their thinking, creating a sense of intimacy and continuity, true to life but not hard news.

There is here, nevertheless, a journalistically wide range of viewpoints, from militant hardliners to pacifists, not to mention a broad spectrum of Kosovans: ethnic Albanians, Serbs, Roma, Turks, Bozniaks, Ashkalis.

If this is photojournalism, Friend has taken it into a thoughtful, slower, deeper place, with text that is as moving and relevant as image.

www.midnighteditions.com



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