

gulleh (p. 8, for *goluleh*, lit. bullet) in a dictionary. Also, for a coauthored book the authorial “I” occurs far too often. None of these flaws detract from the value of this erudite and well-written book, which I read in one sitting.

Finally, it is only fair to mention Anthony Shay’s extraordinary sixteen-page foreword. Far more than a “foreword,” this text is in fact a rich and encyclopedic introduction to the study of Iranian music. It is a reflection of Shay’s generosity, also acknowledged by the book’s authors, that he put so much effort into his exordial text.

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Television and the Afghan Culture Wars: Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Activists. Wazhmah Osman, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2020

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In the past few decades, scholars of Media Studies have de-provincialized perspectives from the Global South and expanded the scope of theoretical and methodological contributions to the field. Scholars of Afghanistan Studies also have contributed new insights that challenge colonial and neocolonial discourses of the country as tribal and isolated, and instead showcase Afghan engagements with global flows of knowledge and information exchange across space and time. Wazhmah Osman’s pioneering scholarship places Afghanistan within the analytical framework of both fields. It reveals how a televisual cultural arena shaped by local and global forces serves as a significant ideational space for critical discussions surrounding issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and healing in the post-9/11 era. As an original ethnographic study of television in Afghanistan, this work challenges paternalistic narratives of development by redirecting the global dialogue about Afghanistan to Afghans themselves.

Osman’s main argument is that Afghan media producers have provided a platform for local reform, activism, and indigenous modernities to flourish and thus have the potential “to underwrite democracy, national integration, and peace” (p. 3). Even though media producers face a broad range of national and international constraints intended to control their cultural production, they continue to meet the needs and expectations of a traumatized Afghan public interested in content that provides a counterbalance to the government, “warlords,” and foreign interests. Amid these culture wars—broadly described as cultural contestations inspired by the media alongside the political economies that sustain them—Osman places questions of gender and sexuality at the center of her study. Moving beyond the well-critiqued depiction of Afghan women through the lens of Western media, Osman decisively examines *Afghan* representations of Afghan women in the media as producers, actors, and consumers. In her critical but sensitive portrait, her study offers an exploration of how Afghans assert their political claims through local cultural contestations that give way to collective action, social movements, and self-representation (pp. 5–6). The result is a crucial and engaging reflection of television’s usage and power in a media world that is at once fragile and viable, fractured and vibrant.

The book’s six chapters guide the reader through the cultural topography of Afghanistan via its mediascape, placing postcolonial critique, gender, and ethnicity as core tenants. A historical overview of twentieth-century reforms and nation-building projects initiated by the British, Russians, and Americans sets the tone for later discussions regarding international

interventions, military campaigns, and development projects, focused on the media. A productive and important contribution of this book is Osman's positing of the term "development gaze" alongside "imperial gaze," thereby providing a new framework for understanding media in Afghanistan (see chapter 4). Whereas the imperial gaze is often exploitative and extractive, the development gaze is an attempt to consider the welfare and advancement of Afghans in their everyday lives. In the context of television, this distinction is significant for what it reveals about the medium's ability to bridge ethnic divisions. Based on her interviews with Afghan media producers, Osman argues that "most of them aspire to establish the mindset for an inclusionary, multiethnic Afghanistan where people peacefully coexist" (p. 154). Her analysis offers a critical perspective of the stated aims of benevolent international interventions and their entanglements with neocolonial economic and geopolitical agendas.

The book's most gripping chapters illuminate Osman's original empirical and ethnographic contributions. The book captures the experiences of a broad and diverse range of Afghan media producers and consumers spanning genders and perspectives from Kabul, Jalalabad, Bamiyan, Herat, Mazar-i Sharif, Logar, Sorubi, Istalif, Kunduz, Faizabad, and Panjshir, among others. Chapter 3 is centered on questions of political economy, tracing the local (ethnic) and global (foreign) flows of capital that fund and support media outlets, categorizing them in three groups: national, sectarian, and niche. Through this matrix, Osman enlarges critical discussions of how funding impacts the ideologies and production of various kinds of television programs. That Afghanistan's media circuits are supported by a broad range of donors lends itself to a public interest model, by which different media channels compete with one another. Osman posits this model in direct opposition to the corporatized and capitalistic ventures found in the West that have more control and capitalistic hegemony over media broadcasting. Against this backdrop, what comes into full view is the depth and breadth of diverse media outlets that are available in Afghanistan, from stations that are supported by the Afghan government and international organizations, to those regionally funded by specific ethnic groups, to still others with various agendas. This mapping of media geographies and flows of capital that operate inside Afghanistan reveals the cultural contestations Osman captures throughout the book.

Chapter 5 focuses on women in the media and forms the crux of Osman's study. Building on her conceptualization of the imperial gaze, Osman provides a postcolonial critique of American imperialism in Afghanistan, highlighting the problematic discourse of "saving Afghan women" as the justification for military interventions. Against this, Osman examines how Afghan women's involvement in television media negates the "savior-impulse objectives" of international interventions. Instead, she highlights the women's agency and power in determining their public depictions through media channels. The example of Saba Sahar, an actress, director, and police officer who stars in films as a hero that saves Afghanistan from fictional and historic foreign invaders is a powerful example that illustrates this point. Journalists like Zara Sepher and Faranaz Forotan interview and challenge some of the most powerful politicians, religious clerics, and decision makers across the political spectrum. Here, examples of Afghan women in media take them beyond the imaginations of passive consumers and reinforce their participation in the construction of mediated representations of their gender. Yet a fascinating subplot to this story is the degree to which issues of gender and class also have made women the targets of violence and threats. Osman argues that, although TV stations funded by the international community place Afghan women on screen as evidence of progress and gender equality, they do not consider the grave consequences underlying this image-making. As these women become more high-profile, their popularity makes them a target for various actors opposed to the presence of women in such public roles. In the past year, the growing amount of violence surrounding journalists, and particularly women, serves as substantial evidence to bolster Osman's claims.

In a final chapter, Osman provides a study of international soap operas—namely Turkish and Indian—as the most popular forms of broadcast entertainment of Afghan viewers.

Although soap operas have been highly stigmatized as well as gendered and feminized in the West, in much of the rest of the world, explains Osman, dramatic serials are popular across genders because their subject matter, focused on domestic stories, is relatable to a broad spectrum of society. Rather than impeding Afghanistan's own media industry, the popularity of Turkish and Indian soap operas reflects the global and cosmopolitan desires of Afghan consumers.

Although this study maintains a convincing and critical view of colonial and neocolonial interventions in Afghanistan, it is less critical of some vocabularies that derive from these practices, including descriptors such as "warlords." Osman's usage of the term includes both local and international culprits; however, warlord came into rampant use by US policy makers in the post-9/11 context to refer to Afghan political and militia leaders who have been active from the Soviet-Afghan war to the present. Moreover, the term has changed meanings over time and across a broad spectrum: from more favorable contexts to those with more adverse connotations. The usage of such terms signals the limitations language places on understanding development and conflict more broadly in the region. This raises significant questions about how Afghans evaluate their own advancements, systems of belief, and understanding of themselves amid war and remakings of their country.

In summary, *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars* poignantly critiques discourses of failure and immutability, bringing to the foreground the dynamism and talents of an Afghan population that is well-integrated with global flows of consumption and entertainment. Nuanced and deeply researched, this book breaks new ground in the exploration of global media's entanglements with war, empire, and democracy in the Global South. It will be of particular interest to students and scholars of international and global communication and media studies, and it also will appeal to a broad spectrum of fields across the humanities and social sciences, including anthropology, development, gender studies, history, and theory, among many others. The self-reflective tone and interwoven accounts of the author make *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars* a rarity among scholarly works. It is both readable and theoretically rigorous, and it will be an excellent addition to undergraduate syllabi and graduate reading lists. That the publication of the book coincides with the US troop pullout and the recent streak of violent and deadly attacks on journalists and media producers inside the country makes Osman's work not only timely, but essential for anyone interested in this critical moment of "peacemaking" for Afghans, Americans, and their international interlocutors.

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The Origins of the Arab-Iranian Conflict: Nationalism and Sovereignty in the Gulf between the World Wars.

Chelsi Mueller (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 274 pp.

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Across eight chapters, Chelsi Mueller narrates a detailed diplomatic history of the Persian Gulf between the two World Wars. By sifting through an array of sources, including British colonial records, published Iranian foreign ministry documents, and Arabic sources, she identifies this quarter century as pivotal, casting a shadow over relations between Iranians and Arabs to the present day. Reading these materials more with than against the grain, she concludes that the interwar era was "a watershed separating millennia of interconnectedness and interdependence in the Persian Gulf from an era of geopolitical