

of another important taste-making demographic: Iranians residing in South Asia. The role of émigré Iranian literary figures such as Hazin Lahiji (d. 1766) and Valih Daghistani (d. 1756) in fortifying literary attitudes along regional lines—and in transregionalizing literary attitudes—may have merited more attention. This, however, is one of the many enticing invitations *Remapping Persian Literary History* issues to scholars interested in this dynamic but understudied period. Clear, succinct, and engaging closely with up-to-date scholarship in English and Persian, this book is essential reading for scholars and students of Persian literary history, the Persianate world, and emergent literary nationalisms.

doi:10.1017/S0020743821000568

**Television and the Afghan Culture Wars: Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords and Activists. Wazmah Osman (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020). Pp. 272. \$110.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780252043550**

Reviewed by Nithya Rajan, Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, MN, USA ([raja0145@umn.edu](mailto:raja0145@umn.edu))

In the global imaginary, Afghanistan is a nation of endless war and the Afghan people are its victims, survivors, or perpetrators. *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars* is a revisionist retelling of modern Afghan history told as the story of Afghan television (p. 51)—the most dominant, national, and widely accessed medium in the country. Wazmah Osman convincingly demonstrates that Afghan television media with up to a hundred free channels and a wide variety of programming is not only an important signifier of everyday life, politics, and culture in modern Afghanistan, but also one of the most potent sites of cultural contestations and subversion. While the ongoing United States military presence, conflict, and violence are not the primary focus of the book, Osman expertly shows how this context—which is further complicated by ethnic sectarianism, traditional codes of gender, and more importantly, US funding—shapes Afghan television programming. The contemporary Afghan media that evolved through state-sponsored programming under Soviet rule, reform movements, and strict control by the Taliban, consist of a wide range of broadcast and terrestrial television networks. It includes both public media like the Radio Television Afghanistan and private networks like Tolo TV, ATN, and iTV, each affiliated with a different ethnic group. Together they produce a wide variety of programs ranging from Public Service Announcements (PSAs), Public Interest Campaigns (PICs), political satire and hard-hitting political talk shows, music competitions, reality shows, news, and soap operas. Through wide-ranging ethnographic research, Osman weaves a cohesive yet complex picture that captures all these disparate factors and tells the story of how television channels— beholden to their funders, ethnic affiliations, and the need to pacify Islamists and warlords—nonetheless collectively further the vision of a modern, unified, progressive, and peaceful Afghanistan. This book will be of interest to scholars of gender, postcolonialism, US imperialism, transnational feminism, and cultural studies.

In its six chapters, drawing on ethnographic research at various prominent television networks like Tolo TV, Shamshad TV, and Ariana Television Network, Osman shows how USAID and other US-based funding which constitute a significant part of the budget of many TV stations and shapes their programming, is a potent example of US cultural imperialism. Pointing to the unpredictable effects of foreign funding in Global South nations like Afghanistan, Osman insists that despite its imperialist motives, the funding received by television stations has resulted in the creation of a robust media sector that caters to public interests. It is in this context that Osman introduces her main theoretical intervention of “imperial gaze” versus “developmental gaze” (p. 134). Osman defines the “imperial gaze” as duplicitous and furthering the economic and political interests of imperial nations. It is differentiated from the “developmental gaze” which is defined as driven by an inclusive, pluralist, national ethos and a desire to create a just future for Afghan people (p. 137). According to Osman, it is important

to differentiate between these two gazes because “their political outcomes and ramifications are worlds apart” (p.137). However, given that both originate from the same sources of international funding, and employ “the rhetoric of development, modernity, and democracy” (p. 135), the difference that Osman seeks to illustrate is slippery at times.

Osman uses the concept of “gaze” in a much more expanded sense than how it is typically employed in film and media theory, as a psychological relationship of power. This becomes clear when Osman says, “Afghan television producers seek to bring Pashtuns into the fold of the nation and preserve cultures, in contrast to the British imperial gaze of the past and the present imperial gaze of the United States, which implements violent divide-and-conquer approaches and the full weight of violence and war in order to protect its geopolitical interests in the region” (p. 154). Some might question whether the term “gaze” captures the complexities of the economic and political impact of western imperialism in Afghanistan that Osman is talking about. Nonetheless, Osman’s broad ethnographic research that combines textual/content analysis with a political economy approach captures the rich political and material context of television programming, which a more typical use of the term “gaze” could not have accomplished. Such an approach would be highly reductive and facile in the context of Afghanistan.

Throughout the book, Osman reminds the reader that Afghanistan is a country under occupation. Osman constantly points to the nexus between imperialism and development in the country especially in the functioning of organizations like USAID, but also emphasizes the need “to distinguish between beneficial and problematic development projects” (p. 87). For example, a PSA that telecasts information about which roads are mined helps save Afghan lives and has an effect that is not purely imperialistic even if is funded by the US government. Further, Afghanistan’s current dependence on foreign funding and resources as well as the opposition to such funding from the US right makes Osman’s nuanced approach—that neither accepts unquestioningly nor dismisses outright the impact of foreign-funded development—both pragmatic and necessary. The binaries of good/bad and problematic/beneficial that Osman applies to various development projects may seem formulaic. However, those who work with or study such development projects in Global South contexts know that there are indeed some projects that have positive effects locally despite perpetuating global hierarchies, while others only serve to further the imperial and neoliberal interests of funding agencies.

One of the biggest strengths of the book is Osman’s diligent charting of the contested terrain of women’s representation and visibility on television that reflects the state of women’s rights in Afghanistan. The discussion of women’s visibility on TV in Chapters 5 and 6 illustrates Osman’s argument that television is one of the battlegrounds for culture wars in Afghanistan. Osman writes, “Afghan women have become the ultimate markers of the Afghan nation, and in their televisual representation they are burdened with embodying all the cultural codes of the nation” (p. 156). Despite the heavy scrutiny of women on television, they continue to appear on the screen as program hosts of call-in music shows, journalists, and participants of reality shows, albeit in much smaller numbers than men. Private television networks funded by foreign donors are able to denounce and defy the directive that all women appearing on television must be veiled and also produce shows that “talk back” to the global representations of Afghan women (p. 168).

However, Osman is careful not to be celebratory and enumerates the cost of such visibility for Afghan women. This includes the stigma attached to women actors and contestants in reality singing competitions like the vastly popular *Afghan Star*, the murder of numerous women journalists, TV presenters, and even radio producers. Even as many private TV networks are committed to “talking back” to conservative forces they are unable to protect their women employees. The ways in which television networks negotiate these challenges is illustrated through Osman’s analysis of talk shows like *Naquab* (The Mask) that challenge misogynistic norms and practices while protecting their women hosts by having them wear masks. Those reading the book due to an interest in film and media theory may be left wanting a thicker description and deeper analysis of these programs. The strength of Osman’s work is in the sheer breadth of its ethnographic scope which paints a nuanced picture of television media in Afghanistan through interviews with TV producers, filmmakers, journalists, and the Afghan people who consume these programs avidly.

Osman’s commitment to tracing the crucial role that ethnic affiliation plays in the Afghan culture wars is evident in her consistent documentation of the ethnic allegiances of the networks she discusses. This

attention to ethnic affiliations and faultlines is important given the degree to which Afghan social life is organized on ethnic lines. Osman shows that although TV networks use their programming for ethnic aggrandizement, they all subscribe to the idealistic vision of creating a united, multiethnic, and peaceful Afghanistan. One example that Osman provides is that of the Pashtun-affiliated Shamshad TV's efforts to bring Pashtun people "into the fold of the nation" and out of tribalism through Pashto educational programming (p. 152). While Osman argues that this vision of a united Afghanistan that drives the original programming created by Shamshad TV and other Afghan channels is a positive impact of the "development gaze," its effect on the intended audiences is not discussed.

Osman's book is an excellent addition to the scholarship on Afghanistan, especially given the continued dominance of Western and non-Afghan scholars the field. Beyond the book's obvious contribution to media studies, Osman's political economy focused approach makes it an excellent introductory text on contemporary Afghanistan through a non-western perspective that centers the everyday life, agency, and desires of ordinary Afghans.

doi:10.1017/S002074382100060X

## **Israel/Palestine: Border Representations in Literature and Film.** **Drew Paul, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.) Pp. 224. \$100. Cloth.** **ISBN: 9781474456128**

Reviewed by Yue Han, Near and Middle East Section, School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, SOAS, University of London, London, UK ([634090@soas.ac.uk](mailto:634090@soas.ac.uk))

With *Israel/Palestine*, Drew Paul makes a valuable contribution to filling a gap in scholarship about the Israeli and Palestinian literary and cinematic representations of borders. Namely, he focuses on novels and films that center on borders and Palestinian encounters with them. In doing so, Paul unfolds for readers the various natures of borders that Israeli and Palestinian authors and filmmakers represent from the late 1960s to the post-Second Intifada period, the artistic strategies they use in representation and the ways their illusions of Israeli-Palestinian coexistence (affected by their own experiences, the change of border spaces and social-political contexts) inform their representations.

The book is well structured and layered. The first chapter gives a comprehensive and in-depth introduction to the border in question—the "wall", also known as the "separation barrier" or the "security fence", which was built by Israel to separate Palestinian-controlled regions of the West Bank from Israeli-administered territories, as well as the internal barriers within the Palestinian-controlled regions consist of checkpoints, walls and settlements which were built by Israel to restrict Palestinian space and movement—including the border's definition, expansion, influence, and illusory nature, as well as the metaphor, fiction, allegory, fantasy, and symbolic meanings that are engaged with borders and border encounters. Then Paul groups border representations in both literature and film into two sections according to different themes. The first section focuses on the theme of border expansion in literary works with Chapters 2 and 3, while the second section centers on the theme of the deceptive nature of the borders with Chapter 4 examining literary works and Chapters 5 and 6 analyzing cinematic border representations. Paul reveals the deceptive nature of the borders represented in both literature and film from the perspective of representation techniques, including the stray narratives used in literary works and different cinematic languages, such as camera movement, performance and editing, applied in cinematic works.

Chapters 2 and 3 chart the gradual disappearance of a utopian vision of Israeli-Palestinian coexistence in which the proliferation of border spaces plays a vital catalytic role in border representations in literary works. By comparing Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Returning to Haifa* (*'A'id Ila Hayfa*, 1969) with one of its literary afterlives, Sami Michael's novel *Doves in Trafalgar* (*Yonim be-Trafalgar*, 2005), Paul contends