Nosheen Ali. *Delusional States: Feeling Rule and Development in Pakistan's Northern Frontier*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Hardback (€ 5/$99.99). 304 pp. ISBN 9781108609166.

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Why do state subjects express devotion and loyalty to a centre that repeatedly fails to provide adequate life provisions or the dignity one is entitled to by way of citizenship? How does the state, in turn, manipulate the intense desire to belong to extend, rule, and control? In engaging lyrical prose, Nosheen Ali takes on these questions in *Delusional States*, which above all is an attentiveness to anguish and unrequited love.

Delusional States is a welcomed entry into a growing body of critical scholarship on Kashmir and its intersecting borderlands. Set in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan's north and part of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the book encourages us to do away with our maps, binoculars, and safari suits, even if only for a moment. Instead of repurposing tired securitised narratives of Pakistan and its borders or the Kashmir conflict, Ali invites the reader to engage in *other* kinds of border-crossings. For one, she reminds us that Gilgit-Baltistan is a Shia-majority region, an obstacle to Pakistan's nationalist normative Islam. She also reminds us that inclusion should not be only conceptualised in terms of political rights (a lens that over-determines the discourse on the region) but also ecological and religious sovereignty. Exploited by the Pakistani state and its military under the guise of the "noble" Kashmir cause, *Delusional States* provides an urgent glimpse of Gilgit-Baltistan. It offers important clues to create counter-narratives to the militarised, anti-Shia, and anti-feminist Islams that are often forced onto the contested region. By investing in affect, feeling, and poetic knowledges, Ali enables us to consider Gilgit-Baltistan on its own terms, not as a subject of Pakistan, nor a colony of Kashmir.

Feeling the State

Ali aims to understand state-making processes in Gilgit-Baltistan, given the region's unusual configuration within Pakistan and the Kashmir conflict. Currently, Gilgit-Baltistan is not a truly autonomous region, nor does it have provincial status. Arguably, it receives differing political treatment from the sister region of Azad Jammu and Kashmir also under Pakistan's jurisdiction (see Sökefeld 2015). Political opinions in Gilgit-Baltistan vary, local voices either call for full integration into Pakistan's provincial infrastructure or further autonomy. Pakistan has historically denied provincial

status to the region, citing that this will undermine Kashmir's sovereignty from Indian rule. Additionally, it has only taken poorly conceived and inadequate top-heavy steps to "empower" local governance in the region. Its people feel betrayed; why is their intense devotion and affinity towards Pakistan and a burning desire to be a part of the nation so carelessly dismissed? In fact, in the book's opening, Ali describes how the people of Gilgit-Baltistan often narrate Pakistan's continual violations in the region (such as the abduction of political activists) through the language of betrayal and heartache. Ali shows us that Gilgit-Baltistan occupies an interstitial space between belonging and un-belonging, inclusion and rejection; its people perhaps experience the most demoralising political stance of all – that of Pakistan's indifference.

Ali captures this dejection rather beautifully and skilfully argues that feelings and emotion are central to the state–citizen relation, which in itself hinges on love, betrayal, and desire. Through textured and layered engagements with a range of textual and historical material, Ali demonstrates that the state is less a coherent system of legibility, but an assemblage that achieves rule through emotional regulation. She shows the reader how various regimes of representation and control are "felt intensely and intimately in Gilgit-Baltistan, evoking an anguished emotionality against multiple forms of injustice" (260). However, the attention to affect and feeling is mostly approached as a structuring force (similar to Raymond Williams' earlier works on structures of feeling) and primarily serves as a sociological lens for sense-making. Affect is less so treated as an excessive, leaky, and disorienting force that can implode meaning, unnerve conceptual certainty, and challenge the many realisms that situate subject and location. I wonder if the author had taken up affect as it is increasingly positioned within critical theory and its many contemporary iterations in feminist and queer spaces, a further different portraiture of Gilgit-Baltistan could have been achieved. I also found it slightly challenging to place Gilgit-Baltistan within the traditions and legacies of love in South Asia, which the author draws upon in the introductory chapter. Arguably, the somewhat forced inclusion of the region into South Asia's histories and legacies is an important reason behind the disputed status of Gilgit-Baltistan and the greater Kashmir region, as they do not occupy a settled space within the domineering imaginations of the Indian subcontinent. But perhaps, the aspirations and lives of people therein can be differently expressed by an investment in *other* forms of attachment which exceed the historiographies of national-borders and states (see e.g. Aijazi 2020a, 2020b, 2018). Nonetheless, the lens of emotional manipulation and unreciprocated love is an exciting and novel way of illuminating local desires for integration.

Ali engages with state-making via emotional manipulation through a range of entry points, including militarisation and surveillance, sectarianism and schooling, neoliberal environmentalism, poetic publics, and alternate Muslim identities.

These discursive sites illuminate various aspects of emotionality, manipulation, state-rule, and resistance to it. Ali delineates the multiple ways the region has been erased through contradictory modes of representation "that serve to invisibilise the region, its people, and their political marginalisation" (32). She successfully achieves this by focusing on the shifting terminology for the region, ever-changing maps, and the obfuscation of census data. These aspects of the writing could have been further strengthened by a more dedicated commitment to lived and felt experience and ethnographic-style reportage. The lack of sustained ethnographic writing adds a curious opacity to the book. I am also less sympathetic to the author's desire to make linkages with the US's forever war on terror and efforts to expand (not collapse) the geopolitical implications and embeddedness of the region. However, given Ali's transnational location, I can understand why these matters interest the author.

What does it Take to Write a Book?

I came across Nosheen Ali's writings during graduate school when I struggled to find adequate language on Pakistan's relationship with its borderlands. While a handful of scholars explore some aspects of this in various ways, they don't quite embody the rawness and blunt risks of tackling these urgent questions as a Pakistani citizen. This adds gravitas and integrity to Ali's writings because the author, a Pakistani, faces several hurdles to her work, its acceptability, and broader circulation. Speaking out against the injustices of the Pakistani state in its frontier regions, which it tries exceptionally hard to portray as idyllic tourist hotspots or as the nation's ecological heaven, presents the risks of having one's work dismissed domestically and being harassed by the state's intelligence apparatus (see also Ali 2018). Writing about Gilgit-Baltistan in truthful ways also makes one susceptible to being considered a traitor to ongoing struggles for Kashmir's sovereignty and to even justify Indian oppression on Kashmiris under its jurisdiction. Additionally, Ali points to another struggle: publishing in an academic press and its straightening and homogenising desires. The following book excerpt, which I think is worth quoting in length here, summarises the struggle:

> To claim my own citizenship within academic worlds, I have often been asked to "change the tone" of my work – a tempering that is of thoughts, feelings, and ultimately, of politics. An analysis that cares is often deemed feeble and unacceptable. Specifically, the transnational lens of my work which incorporates the US and Pakistan in a single analytical frame causes deep discomfort to white reviewers, who prefer that my analysis remain confined to the "local". . . . My critique of US imperialism and humanitarianism . . . was deemed by some

> reviewers to be "irrelevant" to understanding Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan, by others to be too "indignant". One reviewer felt that my discussion was "crude" and polemical. My language could be more "nuanced" – which meant, not as direct . . . Such punitive gatekeeping of feminist knowledge from colonised people of colour, reinforces the racial, gendered, and religious biases that are already rampant within deeply embedded structures of the world and academia. And it is akin to the patriarchal forms of disciplining that require women to be nice, polite, emotionally cautious and subdued, and politically conformist and non-confrontational. . . . This deprivation and suppression is the bedrock of academic imperialism. (23–4)

The challenges Ali summarises above are intertwined with the way Gilgit-Baltistan is positioned in relation to Pakistan and the Kashmir conflict in an odd zero-sum game. These considerations intimately inform the difficulties of centring the lived and felt experiences of those whose bodies are marked by the ambitions of state-making projects in a climate of high geopolitics, strategic reasoning, and the rhetoric of "national interest". By this I am implying that it is the feminist and experiential modes of knowledge which Ali seeks to centre in her book – i.e. knowledge produced at the intersections of racialised, gendered, and various forms of "Othering" processes and in opposition to imperial knowledge production – that are needed to unmoor Gilgit-Baltistan from its current colonial fixity. In several places in the book, one can find traces of the author pushing against the instrumental gaze of academic knowledge production and its adjudication processes. This has had the wonderful effect of adding further clarity and nuance to the writing.

Conclusion

Gilgit-Baltistan sits uncomfortably at the crossroads of Pakistan's state-making ambitions and received narratives of the Kashmir conflict. Ali shows us that its people do not enjoy the same sympathy that Kashmiris tend to gather in the country. Instead, they are often seen as an impediment to Kashmir's sovereignty and even that of Pakistan. As stated earlier, a substantial majority in Gilgit-Baltistan desire a deeper merger into Pakistan. However, it is difficult to know what the people of Gilgit-Baltistan truly desire, given the continual suffocation of grassroots political organising and dissenting voices. Equally, no sizeable efforts have been made to date by the Pakistani state to engage the aspirations of the people of the region sincerely. Instead, their voices have been overwhelmed by the geopolitical realisms of security and resource extraction, leaving little opportunity to dwell within the genius of people's struggles therein. Pakistan recently announced its decision to grant the semi-autonomous, federally administered region of Gilgit-Baltistan the status of a

full province. When and if this is implemented, it remains to be seen whether such a move alone will be enough to undo decades of neglect and violence in the region.

Delusional States offers a poignant mediation on citizen–state relations in Gilgit-Baltistan. Its unapologetic tone and unwavering focus help us consider that an egalitarian resolution to the anguish of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan will likely enhance not deter the ongoing struggles for Kashmir's sovereignty. The book helps us realise that all social justice movements are inherently interlinked, and one's emancipation cannot hold hostage another's freedom. *Delusional States* reveals the contours of the colonial gaze and the shared ambitions of state-making and imperial knowledge production. The book adds to ongoing conversations in Critical Muslim Studies by highlighting alternate and perhaps disorienting imaginaries of Muslim identity over some settled notion of a "South Asian" Islam. Ali pays attention to Muslim resistant knowledges to note the analytical separations of the centre from the periphery, Gilgit-Baltistan from Pakistan, and the "Muslim world" from the Islamicate. This is urgent and compelling writing and will be of interest to scholars and researchers working at the intersections of Islam, identity, and affect.

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